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A DISSERTATION UPON THE NATURE OF VIRTUE

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WITH INTRODUCTION, ANALYSES, AND NOTES BY

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## NOTE

IN preparing this edition I have tried to keep in view the requirements of the student of Ethics.

I have to acknowledge special indebtedness to the complete edition of Butler's works edited by Dr. J. H. Bernard, whose plan of numbering the paragraphs I have followed, and also to the volume on Bishop Butler in the Leaders of Religion series by Dr. W. A. Spooner.

The Editor's notes are enclosed in brackets.

W. R. M.



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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

BUTLER'S *Fifteen Sermons* were first published in 1726. He informs us in the Preface that they were selected "in a great measure accidentally" from the discourses which he delivered during his tenure of the office of Preacher at the Rolls Chapel. In the second edition, issued in 1729, he added a long preface and made many changes in the text. Both these improvements were intended to remove, as far as possible, the obscurity of which readers seem to have complained. It is the text of the second edition which is printed in this volume. The *Dissertation on Virtue* is the second of the two appendices to the *Analogy*, which was published in 1736. It is in the nature of a footnote to chap. iii., "Of the Moral Government of God."

These sermons are important because they contain the exposition of Butler's ethical theory. With the exception of the last, "On the Ignorance of Man," they are all concerned with moral questions; but the fundamental ideas are to be found in the first three Sermons, in the Preface and in the *Dissertation*. The other Sermons are valuable, in various degrees, as illustrations and applications of Butler's method. None of these discourses has any claim to be regarded as a masterpiece of pulpit oratory. Their style, though often grave, forcible and impressive, is sometimes laboured and difficult, and would not, perhaps, of itself give them a

place in the permanent possessions of English literature. So competent a judge, however, as Mr. W. H. Hutton has recently expressed a very high opinion of Butler's merits as a writer of English. He speaks of his "massive splendour," and thinks that for "massive force" and "sheer weight" Butler is pre-eminent among the writers of his time (*Camb. Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, vol. x. p. 361). The theological ideas which they contain are more fully worked out in the *Analogy*. It is then chiefly as examples of philosophical writing, as essays on the theory of morals, that these compositions are to be judged.

To appreciate fairly Butler's achievement in this field it is almost essential to bear in mind both the prevailing tone of the society in which he lived and the speculations on moral subjects which were current when he wrote. Doubtless it is true of all great thinkers that they cannot be adequately interpreted except in relation to their place in the development of thought and social conditions. But this is true in a special manner of Joseph Butler. His was not one of those minds which find pleasure in speculation because they move easily in a rarefied atmosphere. Thought to him was evidently a labour; he was stirred up to the task only by the pressure of problems which demanded a solution because they affected the conduct and fortunes of men. Thus Butler is a thinker who is in close contact with the life of his time. Yet he succeeds in being concrete without being in the smallest degree personal. Few writers reveal so little of themselves, of their prejudices, history and habits. With an intellect given to brooding over the deepest questions, he distrusted, at the same time, all speculation for its own sake. Frequent expressions show that he regarded with settled suspicion any claim to possess a complete philosophy, or any hope of a final

answer to the ultimate questions which the mind of man can frame. "Other orders of creatures may perhaps be let into the secret counsels of heaven and have the designs and methods of Providence in the creation and government of the world communicated to them: but this does not belong to our condition. . . . Our ignorance, and the little we can know of other things, affords a reason why we should not perplex ourselves about them" (Serm. XV. § 16). It is this unusual combination of qualities which gives Butler's writings their peculiar flavour. He is sternly impersonal yet sternly practical, he limits himself rigorously to questions which are capable of being answered and which need an answer because of their bearing upon conduct; yet he approaches them, not from the point of view of individual feeling or disposition, but from the standpoint of the reason which is common to all men. He wishes to give, not the report of a personal attitude, but the conclusions of a faculty which is universal.

There is sufficient evidence that the moral and religious condition of England in Butler's day was far from satisfactory; though it may be doubted whether the eighteenth century deserved all the scorn which has since been spent on it. Nothing is easier than to draw an indictment against a century; but it is clear enough that, along with a certain grossness and callousness of manners, it was a fashion, at least in educated circles, to depreciate idealism of every kind. More particularly men were prone to cynicism, that easiest of all methods of acquiring a reputation for superior insight, which sees in generous aims and impulses nothing but self-delusion or disguised self-interest. Butler observes that this is the characteristic note of his generation. "I suppose that it may be spoken of as very much the distinction of the present to profess a contracted spirit,

and greater regard to self-interest than appears to have been done formerly" (Serm. XI. § 1). Shaftesbury however suggests that the fault was not entirely on the side of the critics of traditional morality. The serious-minded had attempted to suppress independent discussion of morals and religion in the supposed interests of Revelation. "So much is the religious part of mankind alarmed by the freedom of some late pens, and so great a jealousy is raised everywhere on this account, that whatsoever an author may suggest in favour of religion he will gain little credit in the cause if he allows the least advantage to any other principle" (*Characteristics*, ed. 1727, p. 7).

It is not to be supposed that the "contracted spirit" which Butler laments was in reality based upon a consistent philosophy. Its most congenial literary expression was the *Maxims* of Rochefoucauld, or perhaps the *Fable of the Bees* in which Mandeville maintained, not without wit, that moral codes are either pernicious restraints upon human energies or artful impositions by statesmen upon the common herd. Nevertheless this fashionable cynicism did frequently profess to be founded on a philosophy—upon the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was its putative if not its real father. "Hobbism" is the theory which Butler attempts to meet and overthrow.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is one of the greatest names in English philosophy. Though his opinions on morals and politics have tended to overshadow his other work, perhaps his greatest significance is as a metaphysician and systematic philosopher. To sum up, as far as possible, a philosophy in a phrase, he is the most consistent of materialists. All that exists is matter in motion. To this every species of appearance could, if we had adequate knowledge, be reduced. There is

therefore no such thing as the soul, if by that we mean an immaterial existence ; mental phenomena are the "internal" motions of material particles. Hobbes' purpose was to show how the laws of human nature and society may be deduced from the laws of motion. The purpose was vain, since he was no more able than any other materialist to bridge the gap which divides the material from the mental. His psychological views are however those which are most in harmony with a materialist philosophy. He was led by his theory to undertake an analysis of the human mind ; he has indeed a good claim to be the founder of analytical psychology. From the standpoint of Ethics the important part of his psychology is that which deals with desire and will. In his view man is a creature of manifold appetites which seek their gratification in external things. The gratification of appetite is a heightening of vitality, which is felt by us as pleasure. He goes on to give a deterministic turn to this theory by treating the desires as strictly analogous to physical forces. Freedom, in the sense of being able to choose what we shall will, is an illusion. Every desire, like all other forces, produces its full effect, unless hindered by some other force. Hence will is nothing but the "last appetite," the strongest, the prevailing, desire.

Hobbes generalizes his doctrine of will by saying that all desires have, in the natural state of man, one of two objects, either Pleasure or Self-preservation. These are the two absorbing pursuits of man in a state of nature. But, with the advance of reason, another object takes its place beside them—Power. When man is capable of reflecting on his condition and presenting the future in his imagination, the desire for power awakes, because he sees that it offers opportunity for gratification and relief from insecurity. Here then is the famous doctrine

of the natural egoism of man : that he is by nature not a social being, but is governed solely by the desires for pleasure, preservation and power. But to maintain this position it is, in Hobbes' opinion, necessary to prove that the so-called social affections are nothing but egoism in disguise. Since he has an unrivalled gift of clear statement we may allow him to speak for himself on the subjects of Pity and Charity. " Pity is the imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense of another man's calamity. But when it lighteth on such as we think have not deserved the same, the compassion is greater, because then there appeareth more probability that the same may happen to us : for the evil that happeneth to an innocent man may happen to every man " (*Human Nature*, ix. 10). " There is yet another passion, sometimes called love but more properly good-will or charity. There can be no greater argument to a man of his own power, than to find himself able not only to accomplish his own desires but also to assist other men in theirs : and this is that conception wherein consisteth charity. In which, first is contained that natural affection of parents to their children . . . as also that affection wherewith men seek to assist those that adhere unto them. But the affection wherewith men many times bestow their benefits on strangers is not to be called charity, but either *contract*, whereby they seek to purchase friendship, or *fear*, which maketh them to purchase peace " (*op. cit.* ix. 17). The general tendency of these analyses is obvious. It is that all affections can be shewn to have the self-interested love of power or pleasure as their source. The proposition is not that genuinely disinterested affections are foolish, but that they are impossible.

Such thorough-going egoism leads to an important consequence in ethical theory. There cannot be a

Common or Universal Good which transcends and includes the true good of every finite person. There will be as many Goods as there are individuals. This is a conclusion which Hobbes does not hesitate to draw. "Every man, for his own part, calleth that which pleaseth him and is delightful to himself good, and that evil which displeaseth him : insomuch that while every man differeth from another in constitution they differ from one another concerning the common distinction between good and evil. Nor is there any such thing as absolute goodness, considered without relation : for even the goodness which we apprehend in God Almighty is his goodness to us " (*Human Nature*, vii. 3).

The natural condition of mankind is therefore one of egoistic striving, "a war of all against all." This state is however far from being a happy one, it is a scene of "continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short " (*Leviathan*, xiii.). Reflection leads to the discovery that an unlimited indulgence of egoistic impulses by all is not the best policy in the interests of all. So arises the transition from unsocial warfare to settled social life. Hobbes chooses to represent this under the fiction of a "social contract " by which each individual resigns a portion of his "natural right " to seek his own interest by every means in his power, on condition that all others do the same. It is "as if every man should say to every man, I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man or to this assembly<sup>1</sup>— condition, that thou give up thy right to be governed by all his actions in like manner. The multitude so united in one person is called a sovereign. . . . This is the generation of civil society rather (to speak more reverently) of that which we owe, under the

defence" (*Leviathan*, xvii.). The essential feature of this doctrine is, not the somewhat fantastic idea of a "social contract," but the view which it implies of the nature and functions of society. Society is not a natural growth, nor is the social life the natural condition of man; society is an artificial construction the restrictions of which are undertaken in order to escape the worse discomforts of unbounded war. When once the state has been constituted, Hobbes argues that the authority of the Governor ought to be practically unlimited; since rebellion is contrary to the fundamental purpose of the social order, the preservation of peace.

Further, it is only within society that moral distinctions have any meaning. Morality consists of those general rules, called by Hobbes "natural laws," which are necessary for the maintenance of society. They may be summed up in the golden rule expressed in a negative form, "Do not that to another which thou wouldest not have done to thyself." These general rules are based on reason and are, in a sense, "eternal and immutable," because they are always and everywhere the necessary supports of that social order which is the requisite condition for the welfare of the individual. It is important to notice that Hobbes does, in a manner, believe that morality is rational and universal because this point has generally been overlooked by his critics. Nevertheless it is true to say that, for the individual, the source of moral obligation is not reason but the commands of the state he accepts the standards apply to his life. "In the state of man is his own judge, and differeth in the names and appellations of differences arise quarrels and necessary there should be a that might fall in con-

troversy. As, for example, of what is to be called right, what good, what virtue. . . . This common measure some say is right reason, with whom I should consent if there were any such thing *in rerum natura*. But commonly they that call for right reason to decide any controversy do mean their own. But this is certain, seeing right reason is not existent, the reason of some man or men must supply the place thereof: and that man or men is he or they that have the sovereign power, and consequently the civil laws are to all subjects the measures of their actions, whereby to determine whether they be right or wrong, profitable or unprofitable, virtuous or vicious" (*De Corpore Politico*, ii. 10. 8).

It was to be expected that so comprehensive and defiant a philosophy would call forth much opposition; and in fact Hobbism was the centre of ethical discussion for at least a generation. Passing over those criticisms which were ephemeral or merely destructive, we may distinguish two lines of thought which had already been developed in opposition to Hobbism when Butler composed his Sermons: these may be called respectively Rational Intuitionism and Æsthetic Intuitionism. Since Butler was deeply influenced by both of these systems, it will be necessary to discuss briefly their leading ideas.

Rational Intuitionism was the view of ethics which was held by the Cambridge Platonists, a group of writers who, towards the end of the seventeenth century, attempted to work out a religious philosophy on the lines of the later Platonism. The chief point in Hobbes' theories with which they quarrelled was that he appeared to make morality a matter of convention or arbitrary arrangement. In opposition to this they maintained that the moral ideas are as universal and unalterable as the ideas of the intellect, that morality is rooted in the nature of the universe. The best representative of the ethical

teaching of the Cambridge Platonists is Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). Though his book, *Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, was not published until 1731, five years later than Butler's *Sermons*, it is, in reality, a belated summary of the general teaching of the whole school. Cudworth's book is directed against the view that the moral law is a collection of arbitrary enactments, and he deals with both the forms in which that theory has been held. He rejects the view of Calvin, that morality depends on the arbitrary will of God, as well as that of Hobbes, that it depends on the arbitrary law or convention of the state. The argument is that all knowledge is concerned with nothing else but universal ideas which are fixed and immutable. The moral ideas are as universal as those of mathematics. Hence, equally with those of mathematics, they are eternal and immutable and in no sense arbitrary. "There is no such thing as arbitrary Essence, Mode or Relation that may be made indifferently anything at pleasure: for an arbitrary essence is a being without nature, a contradiction and therefore a nonentity. Wherefore the natures of Justice and Injustice cannot be arbitrary things that may be applicable by will indifferently to any actions or dispositions whatsoever. For the modes of all subsistent beings and the relations of things to one another, are immutably and necessarily what they are, and not arbitrary, being not by will but by nature" (*Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 1st ed. pp. 16, 17).

Rational Intuitionism was probably known to Butler chiefly through the writings of Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), with whom he had corresponded on philosophical subjects in his youth and who became, in later years, his friend. Clarke, though not strictly one of the Cambridge Platonists, adopted and carried further their ethical

principles. He agrees with Cudworth that the moral law is rooted in the nature of things, and that its fundamental commands are as self-evident and unalterable as mathematical truths. He goes on however to do what has so often proved fatal to intuitionist theories, he attempts to say what the self-evident moral intuitions are. He holds them to be, Reverence, Equity, Benevolence, Self-preservation. Clarke, in his attempt to remedy a defect in the system, undoubtedly succeeded in revealing its insufficiency. For it is clear, when we have the alleged first principles of morals before us, that they are not really analogous to the axioms of speculative reason ; and it is also evident, not only that they require definition, but that they may conflict with one another. It may be supposed that some sense of these difficulties affected Butler's attitude towards Rational Intuitionism. He speaks of it with respect, and allows that abstract arguments on moral questions may be useful ; but, at the same time, a note of half-suppressed distrust runs through his remarks on his subject. He feels insecure in the speculative region to which Cudworth and Clarke resorted for their foundation, and he prefers to meet Hobbes on his own ground, by the investigation of the actual nature of man as revealed by experience. "Let us return to earth our habitation."

When Butler composed his Sermons another line of thought had been opened up in opposition to Hobbism, and had received considerable attention both from the distinguished rank of its author and the attractiveness of his exposition. Antony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), is the originator and chief representative of what has been called the "Moral Sense Theory" or "Æsthetic Intuitionism." Possibly some of the writings of another member of this school,

Francis Hutcheson (1694-1747), may have been known to Butler when he wrote the *Analogy*, but it was Shaftesbury who made the theory known to him and who influenced his thought. The most important element in Shaftesbury's doctrine is his view of the nature of Conscience. He holds that there is a special moral faculty in man. This faculty, which he calls the "moral sense," passes judgment on individual actions and thoughts as they occur. It is closely analogous to the faculty of æsthetic appreciation; just as the sense of beauty enables us to discriminate beautiful things from ugly ones so the moral sense enables us to differentiate the noble from the base. But it is important to notice that, in this theory, neither the sense of beauty nor the moral sense contain any general principles of beauty or goodness. Both are concerned with the immediate judgment of particulars. The Conscience is not a rational function which applies universal laws to the regulation of conduct; it is rather a species of tact, or a system of instinctive reactions, which causes us to feel rightly in the presence of virtuous or vicious actions. This however, though the most remarkable portion of Shaftesbury's doctrine, is not the whole of it. His view of the nature of Conscience might seem most naturally to lead to the conclusion that the good is an affair of the individual subjective feeling; but this is not the conclusion which he draws. He believes that moral distinctions have independent reality, that deeds are good or bad quite apart from our apprehension of their moral quality. The characteristic property of the good is to be *harmonious* or *proportionate*. In applying this general principle Shaftesbury makes use of the idea of a *system*, which Butler afterwards employed with such effect. Anything is good which is in harmonious relations with the system of which it forms a part. Hence it follows that human

goodness consists in being in harmony with the species of which the individual is a member, and virtuous conduct is that which conduces to the good of the species as a whole. It is therefore, in a sense, true to say that, for this theory, Benevolence is the sum of goodness, since the ultimate criterion is the General Good. The idea that the Good is harmonious is applied also to the individual. The virtuous man is one who maintains a "balance" between "self-affections" and "natural affections," which is Shaftesbury's term for the social and altruistic impulses. Finally, it is argued that virtue and self-interest always coincide in the present world. "To be well affected towards the Public Interest and one's own is not only consistent but inseparable: moral rectitude or virtue must be the advantage and vice the injury and disadvantage of every creature" (*Characteristics*, ed. 1727, vol. ii. p. 81; cf. pt. ii. sects. 1 and 2).

When Butler's ethical teaching is considered in the light of the theories which we have now briefly reviewed, it is clear that, in all its details, it is closely related with them. In each of these schools he has learnt, though none of them have seemed to him to possess the final word. It is not intended to give here a complete summary of the doctrine of the Sermons, for that the reader must be referred to the analyses which are prefixed to them in this edition, but it may be instructive to notice one or two of the more salient points of contact and divergence.

(a) *The Method.* In the main Butler's method is psychological. He agrees with Hobbes that one way of approach to moral problems is through an analysis of human nature. While not denying that a more abstract method is legitimate, he himself begins with an inquiry into the constitution of man. But Butler's method is psychological with a difference. His aim is not mere

observation without pre-suppositions. He assumes at the outset the principle of *teleology*, the existence of "final causes." He takes for granted that man's constitution has some end or purpose. His design then is to study the nature of man in order to discover man's true end, with the pre-supposition that the pursuit of that end will be man's highest life. In working out this conception Butler makes use of the idea of a system which had been employed by Shaftesbury. Human nature is not simply a collection of faculties and impulses, as Hobbes supposed ; it is, or rather is capable of being, a whole, a systematic unity, characterized by harmonious proportion. Further, that harmony does not consist in a mere "balance" between self-regarding and benevolent tendencies, as Shaftesbury had taught. It is to be found in the subordination of the lower elements to those which are, in their nature, more authoritative.

(b) *The social nature of man.* Butler is here writing with Hobbes directly in view. The general principle of his argument is, when allowance is made for the deeper insight of his analysis of human nature, the same as Shaftesbury's. Human nature contains elements which find their exercise in social life. Man has "Particular Passions" which are disinterested and lead, in many cases, directly to social good ; he has the principle of Benevolence which consciously seeks the welfare of others, and Conscience which tends towards the same end. Hence there are clear indications that man is "intended" for social life, that the social order is not artificial but "natural."

(c) *The principles of human nature.* Perhaps the most original part of Butler's teaching is his treatment of the "particular passions." He observes that all desires for particular objects are, in the strict sense, disinterested, since they seek their external object as their end and rest

in that. This psychological truth destroys the basis of Hobbes' Egoism, the view that all desire is necessarily for the pleasure or power of the agent. Above these elementary constituents stand the two regulative principles of Self-love and Benevolence, both of which are rational and have the function of introducing order among the particular passions.

(d) *The nature of Conscience.* Butler's position on this question may be regarded as a kind of *via media* between Rational and Æsthetic Intuitionism. He seems to agree with Shaftesbury that there is a special moral faculty, but for him it is more than feeling or instinct. It is a "principle of reflection," it partakes of the nature of reason. Nevertheless the Conscience is not the same as the theoretical or pure reason, as the Rational Intuitionists seemed to imply. Butler does not clearly draw out the distinction between the pure and the practical reason, as Kant did a few years later, but the distinction is at least latent in his theory of the Conscience.

(e) *The theological background.* Butler does not pretend that his ethics are self-subsistent or complete in themselves. A religious conception of the universe and man is always for him an ultimate axiom. It is this, sometimes tacit, pre-supposition which constitutes his deepest agreement with the Rational Intuitionists, for he too holds, in reality, that Ethics run up into philosophy, and depend on some general theory of the nature of reality as a whole. The theological background is particularly noteworthy at three points in Butler's system. First, the teleological interpretation of the world and human nature is, in his thought, an inference from the belief in a divine Creator and Governor. It is only because we hold that the universe is the work of a purposive Intelligence that we are able to deduce from

the nature of man the end which he is intended to pursue. Secondly, Butler holds that the dictates of Conscience are the voice of God. They are not the pronouncements of a merely subjective tribunal, but the representation in the individual soul of the laws of eternal Justice ; and the Conscience bears witness to the supreme Judgment, "it goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own." Thirdly, Butler is not so easily persuaded as Shaftesbury that virtue and self-interest always agree in the present life. The belief in a Moral Governor of the universe enables us to suppose that a future life will correct any discrepancies of the present, and that, in the long run, the path of duty will be seen to have been the path of true self-interest.

Mark Pattison has said that the *Analogy* sums up the discussions of a generation. The remark is at least as true of the *Sermons*. Butler's ethical teaching not only contains traces of these controversies, but it is built up with ideas suggested by predecessors and contemporaries. Yet it would be unjust to describe him as an "eclectic," if by that is meant one who culls notions from many sources without much care for their consistency with one another. He has thought out all of them afresh, he has given them a new complexion and worked them up into a new combination. He has a clear right to the title of original and synthetic thinker.

We must briefly refer to two serious difficulties under which Butler's theory seems to labour ; one an inconsistency in the theory itself, the other a difficulty which has become more obvious through the advance of knowledge. The first is connected with the relation between Conscience and Self-love. Passages occur which lean to each of the three possible views ; that Conscience is supreme, that Self-love is supreme, and that the two

are of equal authority. The impression which most readers have is that Butler intends to maintain the absolute supremacy of Conscience, and this is probably a fair indication of his fundamental opinion. Against this however must be put the famous passage in which he considers, what he holds to be an impossible case, an ultimate conflict between interest and virtue. "Let it be allowed, though virtue or moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection to and pursuit of what is right and good as such; yet that when we sit down in a cool hour we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our interest, or at least not contrary to it" (Serm. XI. § 20). This is a deliberate and carefully expressed statement, and it is possible to argue, as Dr. Seth does, that Butler is in reality a Hedonist.

Secondly, the facts of human development suggest a difficulty with regard to Butler's view of Conscience. Every attentive reader of the *Sermons* must have asked himself the question, "Does not the assumption run through them that Conscience is always and everywhere the same?" The variations of moral standards, the evolution of moral ideas, are more familiar facts to-day than in the eighteenth century, and it would be impossible for a modern writer to ignore them. But even in Butler's day the general truth that moral codes vary in different stages of civilization was recognized. He appears to have overlooked the deep significance of this fact. He takes for granted too lightly that, apart from the influence of "superstition," the pronouncements of Conscience are always clear and identical.

These unsolved problems are sufficient to show, what was otherwise probable, that Butler's theory as he left it is hardly tenable at the present day. Nevertheless there is no writer who is better qualified to serve as an

introduction to modern Ethics. Most of the central problems are raised by him and are treated in a manner which is closely in touch with the moral experience of the ordinary man. But more particularly are his writings a good avenue of approach to Ethics because they contain in germ most of the ideas which have been worked out by later thinkers. One who has read Butler on the Conscience as a rational principle and authoritative in nature has already made some advance towards understanding Kant's *Practical Reason*.<sup>\*</sup> The close connection of morals with social life on which Butler insists will prepare the way for the Utilitarian doctrine of the Common Good; and even his inconsistencies on the subject of Self-interest may suggest the possibility of conceiving the Good as the greatest pleasure of the greatest number. But nothing in Butler is more instructive than his method. If it goes back to Aristotle it reaches forward to modern Idealism. Man's true life is life according to his nature, says Butler. If we interpret that in a less static and individualistic manner we have the modern theory of Perfectionism, that the End of man is to realize his true or real self within the life of society. Thus, though it may be difficult to estimate Butler's direct influence on the later development of moral theory, the comprehensiveness of his view links him with most of his successors.

Finally, it may be asked whether Butler has any contribution to make to current ethical discussion. Perhaps such a contribution may be found in his clear recognition of the two sides of the study of morals, the scientific and the philosophical, or, as he might have said, the natural and the supernatural. As we have already observed, he realizes the inadequacy of a merely abstract or deductive treatment and the importance of a study of the actual phenomena of the moral life, but

he holds, at the same time, that morals have a super-phenomenal basis. This general truth is important and necessary at the present day. No study of the mere phenomena of morals, whether psychological or historical, can give us a true moral imperative. Only when we adopt a teleological point of view is it possible to reach a conception of a Good which man ought to pursue. In other words, Ethics, if it is to be a complete account of moral obligation, requires some doctrine of the nature of the universe and of man. Morality is intimately connected with religion, and Ethics needs some form of Theology as its completion and support.

W. R. M.

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#### NOTE ON THE EARLY EDITIONS OF THE SERMONS

First Edition. "Fifteen Sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel, by Joseph Butler, LL.B., Preacher at the Rolls and Rector of Stanhope." London, 1726.

Second Edition. With Butler's corrections and additions, and with the Preface. London, 1729.

Third Edition. London, 1736.

Fourth Edition. Including "Six Sermons preached on Publick Occasions, by Joseph Butler, LL.D., now Lord Bishop of Bristol." London, 1749.



# BUTLER'S SERMONS

## AND

# DISSERTATION ON VIRTUE

## THE PREFACE

### ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTORY remarks. §§ 1-5.

A certain degree of obscurity unavoidable in works on Ethics, since the ideas and terms used have no fixed and universal meaning. §§ 6-11.

Two ways of dealing with the subject. (a) Abstract: from the nature and reason of things. (b) Concrete: from the actual constitution of human nature. These two methods not contradictory. The latter chiefly adopted in this book. § 12.

The principle that virtue consists in following nature is true, but needs explanation. § 13.

The meaning of "a system": a whole, consisting of related parts, conducive to some end. Human nature consists of appetites, passions, affections and the principle of reflection. Consideration of the relation of its parts and the authority of Conscience shows that human nature is a "system." § 14.

Vice contrary to the constitution of our nature as a whole. § 15.

This is the true meaning of the principle of the Stoics. § 16.

Summary of the argument of the first three Sermons, §§ 18–24.

In human nature there are some instincts and principles of action which brutes also possess.

But there are others not possessed by brutes—particularly Conscience.

Brutes obey their instincts.

In general men also obey their instincts and principles of action.

Brutes act “suitably to their whole nature.”

This would also be true of men but for the presence of a principle (viz. Conscience) which bears marks of authority over the other principles of human nature.

A defect in Shaftesbury’s theory: it neglects the authority of Conscience and so takes away obligation to virtue when virtue cannot be shown to coincide with self-interest.  
§ 26.

The principle of the authority of Conscience avoids the danger of scepticism with regard to moral obligation. § 27.

The fact that man is, in this manner, a law to himself involves the justice of punishment for the violation of the law. § 29.

A mistake to hold that Goodness cannot be feared (Shaftesbury). Goodness, being an unalterable principle of action, is rightly an object of fear to an evil man. § 30.

Forgiveness of injuries (Serms. VIII. and IX.) in a peculiar sense a Christian precept and in harmony with man’s actual condition. §§ 33, 34.

Self-love and Benevolence (Serm. XI.) not inconsistent with one another. Self-love to be clearly distinguished from “particular passions.” Actions which proceed from self-love may be called “interested,” and actions which proceed from “particular passions” alone “disinterested.” “Particular passions” and self-love may be mingled in many cases; nevertheless the two ideas are distinct. The idea of an “interested” pursuit presupposes the existence of “particular passions” or appetites. §§ 35–37.

Benevolence is not more “disinterested” than any other passion. Hence Self-love and Benevolence are not necessarily opposed to one another; though they are to be distinguished from one another. Further, the good-

ness and badness of actions does not depend on whether they are "interested" or "disinterested." §§ 38, 39.

Self-love is not too strong. The passions frequently prevail over it. Benevolence also is too weak because men are occupied in gratifying passions. § 40.

Epicureans right in wishing that men would cultivate reasonable self-love. Nevertheless the Epicurean account of virtue is false, since virtue is an end in itself. In this it is analogous to the objects of all natural affections. §§ 41, 42.

This principle, that the idea of affection implies resting in its object as an end, should be used in considering the Love of God. Add to this that if we feel affection for parts of creation it is natural to suppose something due to the Author of all things. §§ 43, 44.

(1) **THOUGH** it is scarce possible to avoid judging, in some way or other, of almost everything which offers itself to one's thoughts; yet it is certain, that many persons, from different causes, never exercise their judgment upon what comes before them, in the way of determining whether it be conclusive, and holds. They are perhaps entertained with some things, not so with others; they like, and they dislike; but whether that which is proposed to be made out be really made out or not; whether a matter be stated according to the real truth of the case, seems to the generality of people merely a circumstance of no consideration at all. Arguments are often wanted for some accidental purpose; but proof, as such, is what they never want for themselves, for their own satisfaction of mind, or conduct in life. Not to mention the multitudes who read merely for the sake of talking, or to qualify themselves for the world, or some such kind of reasons; there are, even of the few who read for their own entertainment, and have a real curiosity to see what is said, several, which is prodigious, who have no sort of curiosity to see what is

true : I say curiosity, because it is too obvious to be mentioned, how much that religious and sacred attention, which is due to truth, and to the important question, What is the rule of life ? is lost out of the world.

(2) For the sake of this whole class of readers, for they are of different capacities, different kinds, and get into this way from different occasions, I have often wished that it had been the custom to lay before people nothing in matters of argument but premises, and leave them to draw conclusions themselves ; which, though it could not be done in all cases, might in many.

(3) The great number of books and papers of amusement, which, of one kind or another, daily come in one's way, have in part occasioned, and most perfectly fall in with and humour, this idle way of reading and considering things. By this means, time even in solitude is happily got rid of without the pain of attention : neither is any part of it more put to the account of idleness, one can scarce forbear saying, is spent with less thought, than great part of that which is spent in reading.

(4) Thus people habituate themselves to let things pass through their minds, as one may speak, rather than to think of them. Thus by use they become satisfied merely with seeing what is said, without going any further. Review and attention, and even forming a judgment, becomes fatigue ; and to lay anything before them that requires it, is putting them quite out of their way.

(5) There are also persons, and there are at least more of them than have a right to claim such superiority, who take for granted that they are acquainted with everything ; and that no subject, if treated in the manner it should be, can be treated in any manner but what is familiar and easy to them.

(6) It is true indeed, that few persons have a right to demand attention ; but it is also true, that nothing can

be understood without that degree of it which the very nature of the thing requires. Now morals, considered as a science, concerning which speculative difficulties are daily raised, and treated with regard to those difficulties, plainly require a very peculiar attention. For here ideas never are in themselves determinate, but become so by the train of reasoning and the place they stand in ; since it is impossible that words can always stand for the same ideas, even in the same author, much less in different ones. Hence an argument may not readily be apprehended, which is different from its being mistaken ; and even caution to avoid being mistaken may, in some cases, render it less readily apprehended. It is very unallowable for a work of imagination or entertainment not to be of easy comprehension, but may be unavoidable in a work of another kind, where a man is not to form or accommodate, but to state things as he finds them.

(7) It must be acknowledged that some of the following Discourses are very abstruse and difficult ; or, if you please, obscure ; but I must take leave to add, that those alone are judges whether or no and how far this is a fault, who are judges whether or no and how far it might have been avoided—those only who will be at the trouble to understand what is here said, and to see how far the things here insisted upon, and not other things, might have been put in a plainer manner ; which yet I am very far from asserting that they could not.

(8) Thus much, however, will be allowed, that general criticisms concerning obscurity considered as a distinct thing from confusion and perplexity of thought, as in some cases there may be ground for them ; so in others they may be nothing more at the bottom than complaints, that everything is not to be understood with the same ease that some things are. Confusion and perplexity in writing is indeed without excuse, because any one may, if

he pleases, know whether he understands and sees through what he is about : and it is unpardonable for a man to lay his thoughts before others, when he is conscious that he himself does not know whereabouts he is, or how the matter before him stands. It is coming abroad in a disorder, which he ought to be dissatisfied to find himself in at home.

(9) But even obscurities arising from other causes than the abstruseness of the argument may not be always inexcusable. Thus a subject may be treated in a manner, which all along supposes the reader acquainted with what has been said upon it, both by ancient and modern writers ; and with what is the present state of opinion in the world concerning such subject. This will create a difficulty of a very peculiar kind, and even throw an obscurity over the whole before those who are not thus informed ; but those who are will be disposed to excuse such a manner, and other things of the like kind, as a saving of their patience.

(10) However, upon the whole, as the title of *Sermons* gives some right to expect what is plain and of easy comprehension, and as the best auditories are mixed, I shall not set about to justify the propriety of preaching, or under that title publishing, Discourses so abstruse as some of these are ; neither is it worth while to trouble the reader with the account of my doing either. He must not, however, impute to me, as a repetition of the impropriety, this second edition, but to the demand for it.

(11) Whether he will think he has any amends made him by the following illustrations of what seemed most to require them, I myself am by no means a proper judge.

(12) There are two ways in which the subject of morals may be treated. One begins from inquiring into the abstract relations of things : the other from a matter of fact, namely what the particular nature of man is, its

several parts, their economy or constitution ; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature. In the former method the conclusion is expressed thus, that vice is contrary to the nature and reason of things : in the latter, that it is a violation or breaking in upon our own nature. Thus they both lead us to the same thing, our obligations to the practice of virtue ; and thus they exceedingly strengthen and enforce each other. The first seems the most direct formal proof, and in some respects the least liable to cavil and dispute : the latter is in a peculiar manner adapted to satisfy a fair mind ; and is more easily applicable to the several particular relations and circumstances in life.

(13) The following Discourses proceed chiefly in this latter method. The three first wholly. They were intended to explain what is meant by the nature of man, when it is said that virtue consists in following, and vice in deviating from it ;<sup>1</sup> and by explaining to show that

<sup>1</sup> [The principle that virtue consists in a life according to nature is a common tenet of Stoicism. The meaning of this formula underwent some development in the Stoic school ; in general, however, Stoicism intended by it life in harmony with the Universal Reason which governs nature. Cf. the definition of Chrysippus, "to live virtuously is to live according to scientific knowledge of the phenomena of nature, doing nothing which the Universal Law forbids, which is the Right Reason which pervades all things, and is the same as Zeus, the Lord of the ordering of this world" (Diog. Laer., vii. 87, 88, quoted Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, p. 283). Butler interprets the formula as meaning life in accordance with the true nature of man. There is thus, as Dr. Bernard remarks, some difference between Butler and Stoicism in the use of this principle. The difference is not so great as might appear from a bald statement of the two views, since for the Stoics man was an organic part of nature and indeed a *microcosm* or miniature representation of the Cosmos (see Arnold, *op. cit.* pp. 238-240, and R. D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean*, pp. 74 ff.). Butler's language in the

the assertion is true. That the ancient moralists had some inward feeling or other, which they chose to express in this manner, that man is born to virtue, that it consists in following nature, and that vice is more contrary to this nature than tortures or death, their works in our hands are instances. Now a person who found no mystery in this way of speaking of the ancients; who, without being very explicit with himself, kept to his natural feeling, went along with them, and found within himself a full conviction, that what they laid down was just and true; such an one would probably wonder to see a point, in which he never perceived any difficulty, so laboured as this is, in the second and third Sermons; insomuch perhaps as to be at a loss for the occasion, scope and drift of them. But it need not be thought strange that this manner of expression, though familiar with them, and, if not usually carried so far, yet not uncommon amongst ourselves, should want explaining; since there are several perceptions daily felt and spoken of, which yet it may not be very easy at first view to explicate, to distinguish from all others, and ascertain exactly what the idea or perception is. The many treatises upon the passions are a proof of this; since so many would never have undertaken to unfold their several complications, and trace and resolve them into their principles, if they had thought what they were endeavouring to shew was obvious to every one, who felt and talked of those passions. Thus, though there seems no ground to doubt, but that the generality of mankind have the inward perception expressed so commonly in present passage seems to be suggested by Cicero, *de Off.* iii. 5: "Redeo ad formulam. Detrahre igitur aliquid alteri, et hominem hominis incommodo suum augere commodum, magis est contra naturam quam mors, quam paupertas, quam dolor, quam caetera, quae possunt aut corpori accidere aut rebus externis."]

that manner by the ancient moralists, more than to doubt whether they have those passions; yet it appeared of use to unfold that inward conviction, and lay it open in a more explicit manner, than I had seen done; especially when there were not wanting persons, who manifestly mistook the whole thing, and so had great reason to express themselves dissatisfied with it. A late author of great and deserved reputation says, that to place virtue in following nature, is at best a loose way of talk. And he has reason to say this, if what I think he intends to express, though with great decency, be true, that scarce any other sense can be put upon those words, but acting as any of the several parts, without distinction, of a man's nature happened most to incline him.<sup>1</sup>

(14) Whoever thinks it worth while to consider this matter thoroughly, should begin with stating to himself exactly the idea of a system, economy or constitution of any particular nature, or particular anything: and he will, I suppose, find, that it is an one or a whole, made up of several parts; but yet, that the several parts even considered as a whole do not complete the idea, unless in the notion of a whole you include the relations and respects which those parts have to each other. Every work both of nature and of art is a system: and as every particular thing, both natural and artificial, is for some use or purpose out of and beyond itself, one may add, to what has

<sup>1</sup> *Religion of Nature Delineated*, ed. 1724, pp. 22, 23. [This work was by William Wollaston (1660–1724), a popular writer on moral and religious subjects. He was an exponent of the *a priori* or abstract method in ethics and of the school of Samuel Clarke. His most original doctrine was that all virtues can be deduced from the duty of Veracity. See an amusing account of his views in Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Butler speaks of him with respect, and it is interesting to notice that Wollaston was a favourite writer of Queen Caroline, who was Butler's friend and patroness.]

been already brought into the idea of a system, its conduciveness to this one or more ends. Let us instance in a watch—Suppose the several parts of it taken to pieces, and placed apart from each other: let a man have ever so exact a notion of these several parts, unless he considers the respects and relations which they have to each other, he will not have anything like the idea of a watch. Suppose these several parts brought together and any how united: neither will he yet, be the union ever so close, have an idea which will bear any resemblance to that of a watch. But let him view those several parts put together, or consider them as to be put together in the manner of a watch; let him form a notion of the relations which those several parts have to each other—all conducive in their respective ways to this purpose, shewing the hour of the day; and then he has the idea of a watch. Thus it is with regard to the inward frame of man. Appetites, passions, affections, and the principle of reflection, considered merely as the several parts of our inward nature, do not at all give us an idea of the system or constitution of this nature; because the constitution is formed by somewhat not yet taken into consideration, namely, by the relations which these several parts have to each other; the chief of which is the authority of reflection or conscience. It is from considering the relations which the several appetites and passions in the inward frame have to each other, and above all the supremacy of reflection or conscience, that we get the idea of the system or constitution of human nature. And from the idea itself it will as fully appear, that this our nature, *i.e.* constitution, is adapted to virtue, as from the idea of a watch it appears, that its nature, *i.e.* constitution or system, is adapted to measure time. What in fact or event commonly happens is nothing to this question. Every work of art is apt to be

out of order : but this is so far from being according to its system, that let the disorder increase, and it will totally destroy it. This is merely by way of explanation, what an economy, system, or constitution is. And thus far the cases are perfectly parallel. If we go further, there is indeed a difference, nothing to the present purpose, but too important an one ever to be omitted. A machine is inanimate and passive : but we are agents. Our constitution is put in our own power. We are charged with it ; and therefore are accountable for any disorder or violation of it.

(15) Thus nothing can possibly be more contrary to nature than vice ; meaning by nature not only the *several parts* of our internal frame, but also the *constitution* of it. Poverty and disgrace, tortures and death, are not so contrary to it. Misery and injustice are indeed equally contrary to some different parts of our nature taken singly : but injustice is moreover contrary to the whole constitution of the nature.

(16) If it be asked, whether this constitution be really what those philosophers meant, and whether they would have explained themselves in this manner ; the answer is the same, as if it should be asked, whether a person, who had often used the word resentment, and felt the thing, would have explained this passion exactly in the same manner, in which it is done in one of these Discourses. As I have no doubt, but that this is a true account of that passion, which he referred to and intended to express by the word resentment ; so I have no doubt, but that this is the true account of the ground of that conviction which they referred to, when they said, vice was contrary to nature. And though it should be thought that they meant no more than that vice was contrary to the higher and better part of our nature ; even this implies such a constitution as I have endeavoured to explain. For the

very terms, higher and better, imply a relation or respect of parts to each other ; and these relative parts, being in one and the same nature, form a constitution, and are the very idea of it. They had a perception that injustice was contrary to their nature, and that pain was so also. They observed these two perceptions totally different, not in degree, but in kind : and the reflecting upon each of them, as they thus stood in their nature, wrought a full intuitive conviction, that more was due, and of right belonged to one of these inward perceptions, than to the other : that it demanded in all cases to govern such a creature as man. So that, upon the whole, this is a fair and true account of what was the ground of their conviction ; of what they intended to refer to when they said, virtue consisted in following nature : a manner of speaking not loose and undeterminate, but clear and distinct, strictly just and true.

(17) Though I am persuaded the force of this conviction is felt by almost every one ; yet since, considered as an argument and put in words, it appears somewhat abstruse, and since the connection of it is broken in the first three Sermons, it may not be amiss to give the reader the whole argument here in one view.

(18) Mankind has various instincts and principles of action, as brute creatures have ; some leading most directly and immediately to the good of the community, and some most directly to private good.

(19) Man has several which brutes have not ; particularly reflection or conscience, an approbation of some principles or actions, and disapprobation of others.

(20) Brutes obey their instincts or principles of action, according to certain rules ; suppose the constitution of their body, and the objects around them.

(21) The generality of mankind also obey their instincts and principles, all of them ; those propensions we call

good, as well as the bad, according to the same rules ; namely the constitution of their body, and the external circumstances which they are in. [Therefore it is not a true representation of mankind to affirm, that they are wholly governed by self-love, the love of power and sensual appetites : since, as on the one hand they are often actuated by these, without any regard to right or wrong ; so on the other it is manifest fact, that the same persons, the generality, are frequently influenced by friendship, compassion, gratitude ; and even a general abhorrence of what is base, and liking of what is fair and just, takes its turn amongst the other motives of action. This is the partial inadequate notion of human nature treated of in the first Discourse ;<sup>1</sup> and it is by this nature, if one may speak so, that the world is in fact influenced, and kept in that tolerable order, in which it is.]

(22) Brutes in acting according to the rules before mentioned, their bodily constitution and circumstances, act suitably to their whole nature. [It is however to be distinctly noted, that the reason why we affirm this is not merely that brutes in fact act so ; for this alone, however universal, does not at all determine, whether such course of action be correspondent to their whole nature : but the reason of the assertion is, that as in acting thus they plainly act conformably to somewhat in their nature, so from all observations we are able to make upon them, there does not appear the least ground to imagine them to have anything else in their nature, which requires a different rule or course of action.]

(23) Mankind also in acting thus would act suitably to their whole nature, if no more were to be said of man's

<sup>1</sup> [In the first Sermon the argument turns on the *existence* of Conscience as one of the principles of human nature. In the second Sermon this "inadequate notion" is completed by the contention that Conscience may claim supreme authority in the system of human nature.]

nature than what has been now said ; if that, as it is a true, were also a complete, adequate account of our nature.

(24) But that is not a complete account of man's nature. Somewhat further must be brought in to give us an adequate notion of it ; namely, that one of those principles of action, conscience or reflection, compared with the rest as they all stand together in the nature of man, plainly bears upon it marks of authority over all the rest, and claims the absolute direction of them all, to allow or forbid their gratification : a disapprobation of reflection being in itself a principle manifestly superior to a mere propension. And the conclusion is, that to allow no more to this superior principle or part of our nature, than to other parts ; to let it govern and guide only occasionally in common with the rest, as its turn happens to come, from the temper and circumstances one happens to be in ; this is not to act conformably to the constitution of man : neither can any human creature be said to act conformably to his constitution of nature, unless he allows to that superior principle the absolute authority which is due to it. And this conclusion is abundantly confirmed from hence, that one may determine what course of action the economy of man's nature requires, without so much as knowing in what degrees of *strength* the several principles prevail, or which of them have actually the greatest influence.

(25) The practical reason of insisting so much upon this natural authority of the principle of reflection or conscience is, that it seems in great measure overlooked by many, who are by no means the worst sort of men. It is thought sufficient to abstain from gross wickedness, and to be humane and kind to such as happen to come in their way. Whereas in reality the very constitution of our nature requires, that we bring our whole conduct before

this superior faculty; wait its determination; enforce upon ourselves its authority, and make it the business of our lives, as it is absolutely the whole business of a moral agent, to conform ourselves to it. This is the true meaning of that ancient precept, *Reverence thyself*.

(26) The not taking into consideration this authority, which is implied in the idea of reflex approbation or disapprobation, seems a material deficiency or omission in *Lord Shaftesbury's Inquiry concerning Virtue*. He has shewn beyond all contradiction, that virtue is naturally the interest or happiness, and vice the misery, of such a creature as man, placed in the circumstances which we are in this world. But suppose there are particular exceptions; a case which this author was unwilling to put, and yet surely it is to be put: or suppose a case which he has put and determined, that of a sceptic not convinced of this happy tendency of virtue, or being of a contrary opinion. His determination is, that it would be *without remedy*.<sup>1</sup> One may say more explicitly, that, leaving out the authority of reflex approbation or disapprobation, such an one would be under an obligation to act viciously; since interest, one's own happiness, is a manifest obligation, and there is not supposed to be any other obligation in the case.<sup>2</sup> "But does it much mend the matter to take in that natural authority of reflection? There indeed would be an obligation to virtue; but would not the obligation from supposed interest on the side of vice remain?" If it should, yet to be under two contrary obligations, *i.e.* under none at all, would not be exactly the same, as to be under a formal obligation to be vicious, or to be in circumstances in which the constitution of man's nature plainly required that vice should be preferred. But the obligation on the side of

<sup>1</sup> *Characteristics*, v. ii. p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> [Cf. *Analogy*, i. ch. 3.]

interest really does not remain. For the natural authority of the principle of reflection is an obligation the most near and intimate, the most certain and known : whereas the contrary obligation can at the utmost appear no more than probable ; since no man can be *certain* in any circumstances that vice is his interest in the present world, much less can he be certain against another : and thus the certain obligation would entirely supersede and destroy the uncertain one ; which yet would have been of real force without the former.

(27) In truth, the taking in this consideration totally changes the whole state of the case ; and shews, what this author does not seem to have been aware of, that the greatest degree of scepticism which he thought possible will still leave men under the strictest moral obligations, whatever their opinion be concerning the happiness of virtue. For that mankind upon reflection felt an approbation of what was good, and disapprobation of the contrary, he thought a plain matter of fact, as it undoubtedly is, which none could deny, but from mere affectation. Take in then that authority and obligation, which is a constituent part of this reflex approbation, and it will undeniably follow, though a man should doubt of everything else, yet, that he would still remain under the nearest and most certain obligation to the practice of virtue ; an obligation implied in the very idea of virtue, in the very idea of reflex approbation.

(28) And how little influence soever this obligation alone can be expected to have in fact upon mankind, yet one may appeal even to interest and self-love, and ask, since from man's nature, condition and the shortness of life, so little, so very little indeed, can possibly in any case be gained by vice ; whether it be so prodigious a thing to sacrifice that little to the most intimate of all obligations ; and which a man cannot transgress without

being self-condemned, and, unless he has corrupted his nature, without real self-dislike : this question I say may be asked, even upon suspicion that the prospect of a future life were ever so uncertain.

(29) The observation that man is thus by his very nature a law to himself, pursued to its just consequences, is of the utmost importance ; because from it it will follow, that though men should, through stupidity or speculative scepticism, be ignorant of, or disbelieve any authority in the universe to punish the violation of this law ; yet, if there should be such authority, they would be as really liable to punishment, as though they had been beforehand convinced, that such punishment would follow. For in whatever sense we understand justice, even supposing, what I think would be very presumptuous to assert, that the end of divine punishment is no other than that of civil punishment, namely to prevent future mischief ; upon this bold supposition, ignorance or disbelief of the sanction would by no means exempt even from this justice : because it is not foreknowledge of the punishment which renders obnoxious to it ; but merely violating a known obligation.

(30) And here it comes in one's way to take notice of a manifest error or mistake in the author now cited, unless perhaps he has incautiously expressed himself so as to be misunderstood ; namely, that *it is malice only, and not goodness, which can make us afraid*.<sup>1</sup> Whereas in reality, goodness is the natural and just object of the greatest fear to an ill man. Malice may be appeased or satiated ; humour may change : but goodness is a fixed, steady, immovable principle of action. If either of the former holds the sword of justice, there is plainly ground for the greatest of crimes to hope for impunity : but if it be goodness, there can be no possible

<sup>1</sup> *Characteristics*, v. i. p. 39.

hope, whilst the reasons of things, or the ends of government, call for punishment. Thus every one sees how much greater chance of impunity an ill man has in a partial administration, than in a just and upright one. It is said, that *the interest or good of the whole must be the interest of the universal Being, and that he can have no other*. Be it so. This author has proved, that vice is naturally the misery of mankind in this world. Consequently it was for the good of the whole that it should be so. What shadow of reason, then, is there to assert that this may not be the case hereafter? Danger of future punishment (and if there be danger, there is ground of fear) no more supposes malice, than the present feeling of punishment does.

(31) The Sermon *upon the character of Balaam*, and that *upon Self-deceit*, both relate to one subject. I am persuaded, that a very great part of the wickedness of the world is, one way or other, owing to the self-partiality, self-flattery and self-deceit endeavoured there to be laid open and explained. It is to be observed amongst persons of the lowest rank, in proportion to their compass of thought, as much as amongst men of education and improvement. It seems, that people are capable of being thus artful with themselves, in proportion as they are capable of being so with others. Those who have taken notice that there is really such a thing, namely plain falseness and insincerity in men with regard to themselves, will readily see the drift and design of these Discourses: and nothing that I can add will explain the design of them to him, who has not beforehand remarked, at least, somewhat of the character. And yet the admonitions they contain may be as much wanted by such a person, as by others; for it is to be noted, that a man may be entirely possessed by this unfairness of mind, without having the least speculative notion what the thing is.

## THE PREFACE

(32) The account given of *Resentment* in the eig. Sermon is introductory to the following one *upo. Forgiveness of Injuries*. It may possibly have appeared to some, at first sight, a strange assertion, that injury is the only natural object of settled resentment, or that men do not in fact resent deliberately anything but under this appearance of injury. But I must desire the reader not to take any assertion alone by itself, but to consider the whole of what is said upon it : because this is necessary, not only in order to judge of the truth of it, but often, such is the nature of language, to see the very meaning of the assertion. Particularly as to this, injury and injustice is, in the Sermon itself, explained to mean, not only the more gross and shocking instances of wickedness, but also contempt, scorn, neglect, any sort of disagreeable behaviour towards a person, which he thinks other than what is due to him. And the general notion of injury or wrong plainly comprehends this, though the words are mostly confined to the higher degrees of it.

(33) Forgiveness of injuries is one of the very few moral obligations which has been disputed. But the proof that it is really an obligation, what our nature and condition require, seems very obvious, were it only from the consideration that revenge is doing harm merely for harm's sake. And as to the love of our enemies : resentment cannot supersede the obligation to universal benevolence, unless they are in the nature of the thing inconsistent, which they plainly are not.<sup>1</sup>

(34) This divine precept, to forgive injuries and love our enemies, though to be met with in Gentile moralists, yet is in a peculiar sense a precept of Christianity ; as our Saviour has insisted more upon it than upon any other single virtue. One reason of this doubtless is, that it so peculiarly becomes an imperfect, faulty creature.

<sup>1</sup> Serm. IX. § 13.

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it may be observed also, that a virtuous temper of mind, consciousness of innocence, and good meaning towards everybody, and a strong feeling of injustice and injury, may itself, such is the imperfection of our virtue, lead a person to violate this obligation, if he be not upon his guard. And it may well be supposed, that this is another reason why it is so much insisted upon by him, who *knew what was in man*.

(35) The chief design of the eleventh Discourse is to state the notion of self-love and disinterestedness, in order to show that benevolence is not more unfriendly to self-love, than any other particular affection whatever. There is a strange affectation in many people of explaining away all particular affections, and representing the whole of life as nothing but one continued exercise of self-love. Hence arises that surprising confusion and perplexity in the *Epicureans*<sup>1</sup> of old, *Hobbes*, the author of *Reflections, Sentences et Maximes Morales*,<sup>2</sup> and this

<sup>1</sup> One need only look into Torquatus's account of the Epicurean system, in Cicero's first book, *de Finibus*, to see in what a surprising manner this was done by them. Thus the desire of praise, and of being beloved, he explains to be no other than desire of safety : regard to our country, even in the most virtuous character, to be nothing but regard to ourselves. The author of *Reflections, etc., Morales*, says, "Curiosity proceeds from interest or pride ; which pride also would doubtless have been explained to be self-love" (p. 85, ed. 1725). As if there were no such passions in mankind as desire of esteem, or of being beloved, or of knowledge. Hobbes's account of the affections of good-will and pity are instances of the same kind.

<sup>2</sup> [Duc de la Rochefoucauld (1613-1680). The *Maximes* are a collection of cynical aphorisms. So far as any consistent philosophy runs through them they represent egoistic Hedonism. But la Rochefoucauld is not a systematic thinker as Hobbes was. His *Maximes* are rather the effusions of a cold and disillusioned spirit. "Il est de ceux qui aux effusions enthousiastes répondent toujours non" (J. Bourdeau in *Les Grands Ecrivains Français*, p. 97).]

whole set of writers ; the confusion of calling actions interested which are done in contradiction to the most manifest known interest, merely for the gratification of a present passion. Now all this confusion might easily be avoided, by stating to ourselves wherein the idea of self-love in general consists, as distinguished from all particular movements towards particular external objects ; the appetites of sense, resentment, compassion, curiosity, ambition and the rest.<sup>1</sup> When this is done, if the words *selfish* and *interested* cannot be parted with, but must be applied to everything ; yet, to avoid such total confusion of all language, let the distinction be made by epithets : and the first may be called cool or settled selfishness, and the other passionate or sensual selfishness. But the most natural way of speaking plainly, is, to call the first only, self-love, and the actions proceeding from it, interested : and to say of the latter, that they are not love to ourselves, but movements towards somewhat external : honour, power, the harm or good of another : and that the pursuit of these external objects, so far as it proceeds from these movements (for it may proceed from self-love),<sup>2</sup> is no otherwise interested, than as every action of every creature must, from the nature of the thing, be ; for no one can act but from a desire, or choice, or preference of his own.

(36) Self-love and any particular passion may be joined together ; and from this complication, it becomes impossible in numberless instances to determine precisely, how far an action, perhaps even of one's own, has for its principle general self-love, or some particular passion. But this need create no confusion in the ideas themselves of self-love and particular passions. We

<sup>1</sup> Serm. XI. §§ 5-7.

<sup>2</sup> See Serm. I. § 6 note.

distinctly discern what one is, and what the other are though we may be uncertain how far one or the other influences us. And though, from this uncertainty, it cannot but be that there will be different opinions concerning mankind, as more or less governed by interest and some will ascribe actions to self-love, which others will ascribe to particular passions : yet it is absurd to say that mankind are wholly actuated by either ; since it is manifest that both have their influence. For as on the one hand, men form a general notion of interest some placing it in one thing, and some in another, and have a considerable regard to it throughout the course of their life, which is owing to self-love ; so, on the other hand, they are often set on work by the particular passions themselves, and a considerable part of life is spent in the actual gratification of them, *i.e.* is employed, not by self-love, but by the passions.

(37) Besides, the very idea of an interested pursuit necessarily presupposes particular passions or appetites since the very idea of interest or happiness consists in this, that an appetite or affection enjoys its object. It is not because we love ourselves that we find delight in such and such objects, but because we have particular affections towards them. Take away these affections, and you leave self-love absolutely nothing at all to employ itself about ; <sup>1</sup> no end or object for it to pursue, excepting only that of avoiding pain. Indeed the *Epicureans*, who maintained that absence of pain was the highest happiness, might, consistently with themselves, deny all affection, and, if they had so pleased, every sensual appetite too : but the very idea of interest or happiness other than absence of pain implies particular appetite or passions ; these being necessary to constitute the interest or happiness.

<sup>1</sup> Serm. XI. § 9.

(38) The observation, that benevolence is no more disinterested than any of the common particular passions,<sup>1</sup> seems in itself worth being taken notice of ; but is insisted upon to obviate that scorn, which one sees rising upon the faces of people who are said to know the world, when mention is made of a disinterested, generous or public-spirited action. The truth of that observation might be made appear in a more formal manner of proof : for whoever will consider all the possible respects and relations which any particular affection can have to self-love and private interest, will, I think, see demonstrably, that benevolence is not in any respect more at variance with self-love, than any other particular affection whatever, but that it is in every respect, at least, as friendly to it.

(39) If the observation be true, it follows, that self-love and benevolence, virtue and interest are not to be opposed, but only to be distinguished from each other ; in the same way as virtue and any other particular affection, love of arts, suppose, are to be distinguished. Everything is what it is, and not another thing. The goodness or badness of actions does not arise from hence, that the epithet, interested or disinterested, may be applied to them, any more than that any other indifferent epithet, suppose inquisitive or jealous, may or may not be applied to them ; not from their being attended with present or future pleasure or pain ; but from their being what they are ; namely, what becomes such creatures as we are, what the state of the case requires, or the contrary. Or in other words, we may judge and determine, that an action is morally good or evil, before we so much as consider, whether it be interested or disinterested. This consideration no more comes in to determine whether an action be virtuous, than to determine whether it be

<sup>1</sup> Serm. XI. § 11.

resentful. Self-love in its due degree is as just and morally good as any affection whatever. Benevolence towards particular persons may be to a degree of weakness, and so be blameable : and disinterestedness is so far from being in itself commendable, that the utmost possible depravity which we can in imagination conceive, is that of disinterested cruelty.

(40) Neither does there appear any reason to wish self-love were weaker in the generality of the world than it is. The influence which it has seems plainly owing to its being constant and habitual, which it cannot but be, and not to the degree or strength of it. Every caprice of the imagination, every curiosity of the understanding, every affection of the heart, is perpetually showing its weakness, by prevailing over it. Men daily, hourly sacrifice the greatest known interest, to fancy, inquisitiveness, love or hatred, any vagrant inclination. The thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough ;<sup>1</sup> but that they have so little to the good of others. And this seems plainly owing to their being so much engaged in the gratification of particular passions unfriendly to benevolence, and which happen to be most prevalent in them, much more than to self-love. As a proof of this may be observed, that there is no character more void of friendship, gratitude, natural affection, love to their country, common justice, or more equally and uniformly hard-hearted, than the *abandoned* in, what is called, the way of pleasure—hard-hearted and totally without feeling in behalf of others ; except when they cannot escape the sight of distress, and so are interrupted by it in their pleasures. And yet it is ridiculous to call such an abandoned course of pleasure interested, when the person engaged in it knows before-

<sup>1</sup> Serm. I. § 14.

hand, and goes on under the feeling and apprehension, that it will be as ruinous to himself, as to those who depend upon him.

(41) Upon the whole, if the generality of mankind were to cultivate within themselves the principle of self-love ; if they were to accustom themselves often to set down and consider, what was the greatest happiness they were capable of attaining for themselves in this life, and if self-love were so strong and prevalent, as that they would uniformly pursue this their supposed chief temporal good, without being diverted from it by any particular passion ; it would manifestly prevent numberless follies and vices. This was in a great measure the *Epicurean* system of philosophy. It is indeed by no means the religious or even moral institution of life. Yet, with all the mistakes men would fall into about interest, it would be less mischievous than the extravagances of mere appetite, will and pleasure : for certainly self-love, though confined to the interest of this life, is, of the two, a much better guide than passion,<sup>1</sup> which has absolutely no bound nor measure but what is set to it by this self-love, or moral considerations.

(42) From the distinction above made between self-love, and the several particular principles or affections in our nature, we may see how good ground there was for that assertion, maintained by the several ancient *schools* of philosophy against the *Epicureans*, namely, that virtue is to be pursued as an end, eligible in and for itself. For, if there be any principles or affections in the mind of man distinct from self-love, that the things those principles tend towards, or that the objects of those affections are, each of them, in themselves eligible, to be pursued upon its own account, and to be rested in as an end, is implied in the very idea of such principle or

<sup>1</sup> Serm. II. § 25.

affection.<sup>1</sup> They indeed asserted much higher things of virtue, and with very good reason; but to say thus much of it, that it is to be pursued for itself, is to say no more of it, than may truly be said of the object of every natural affection whatever.

(43) The question, which was a few years ago disputed in *France*, concerning *the love of God*,<sup>2</sup> which was there called enthusiasm, as it will everywhere by the generality of the world; this question, I say, answers in *religion* to that old one in *morals* now mentioned. And both of them are, I think, fully determined by the same observation, namely, that the very nature of affection, the idea itself, necessarily implies resting in its object as an end.

(44) I shall not here add anything further to what I have said in the two Discourses upon that most important subject, but only this: that if we are constituted such sort of creatures, as from our very nature to feel certain affections or movements of mind, upon the sight or contemplation of the meanest inanimate part of the creation, for the flowers of the field have their beauty; certainly there must be somewhat due to Him himself, who is the Author and Cause of all things; who is more intimately present to us than anything else can be, and

<sup>1</sup> Serm. XIII. § 5.

<sup>2</sup> [The allusion here is to the controversy on the "disinterested love of God," in which Fénelon and Bossuet were the chief actors. That God should be loved for himself alone and not for the sake of eternal life or any other benefit, was a part of the "quietistic" teaching of Madame Guyon, and was defended by Fénelon in his *Explication des Maximes des Saints sur la Vie Intérieure*. Passages from this book were condemned by Innocent XII. in 1699. For the history of this dispute see Jervis, *History of the Church of France* (1872), ii. ch. 4, and for a discussion of the general question, from a liberal Roman Catholic point of view, see Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element in Religion*, ii. pp. 152-181, where full references are given. Butler explains his own view more fully in Serm. XIII. § 13.]

with whom we have a nearer and more constant intercourse, than we can have with any creature : there must be some movements of mind and heart which correspond to his perfections, or of which those perfections are the natural object. And that when we are commanded *to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul* ; somewhat more must be meant than merely that we live in hope of rewards or fear of punishments from Him ; somewhat more than this must be intended : though these regards themselves are most just and reasonable, and absolutely necessary to be often recollected in such a world as this.

(45) It may be proper just to advertise the reader, that he is not to look for any particular reason for the choice of the greatest part of these Discourses ; their being taken from amongst many others, preached in the same place, through a course of eight years, being in great measure accidental. Neither is he to expect to find any other connection between them, than that uniformity of thought and design, which will always be found in the writings of the same person, when he writes with simplicity and in earnest.

STANHOPE, Sept. 16, 1729.



# SERMONS

## SERMON I.—UPON HUMAN NATURE

### ANALYSIS

EXPOSITION of the original application of the text. §§ 1-3. The analogy between a society and a physical body, suggested in the text, may be given a wider application. The whole nature of man, and the principles which constitute it, analogous to a society and its members. § 4.

The indications that we were made to promote the good of society are as real and of the same kind as the indications that we were made to promote our own good. Any objections against the former may also be urged against the latter. § 5.

Proof of this :—

(a) Benevolence exists as a natural principle. It serves much the same purpose for society as Self-love for the individual. Its existence is a matter of experience. § 6.

(b) There are also particular passions, distinct from Self-love and Benevolence, which tend to public as well as private good. Examples: desire of esteem, approbation, and contempt, love of society, indignation. § 7.

(c) Conscience exists: a matter of experience. Its nature. Illustrations of the impossibility of denying its existence. § 8.

Hence it is clear that man is made to promote good of society equally with his own good: and the intimate

connection between men—man's social nature—is established. Some striking examples of this. §§ 9, 10.

First objection: Tendencies to anti-social conduct also exist in human nature.

Reply: Tendencies injurious to the individual exist in human nature. Ungoverned passions may be contrary to welfare of individual as well as of society. In general, the particular passions tend to promote good of society as well as of individual. §§ 11, 12.

Second objection: There are men without natural affections towards their fellows.

Reply: There are men without natural affections towards themselves. We must take the normal man as our guide to human nature. § 13.

Experience shows that men are as liable to fail in promoting their own interests as in promoting the good of society. This is due to the fact that they have not enough reasonable self-love, or else that they fail to carry out its dictates. § 14.

Conclusion: We act conformably to our nature both in seeking our own happiness and in seeking the welfare of society to the highest possible degree. Most men however violate their nature in both these respects. § 15.

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“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”—Rom. xii. 4, 5.

(I) THE Epistles in the New Testament have all of them a particular reference to the condition and usages of the Christian world at the time they were written. Therefore as they cannot be thoroughly understood, unless that condition and those usages are known and attended to: so further, though they be known, yet if they be discontinued or changed; exhortations, precepts, and illustrations of things, which refer to such circumstances now ceased or altered, cannot at this time be urged in that manner, and with that force which they were to the

primitive Christians. Thus the text now before us, in its first intent and design, relates to the decent management of those extraordinary gifts which were then in the church,<sup>1</sup> but which are now totally ceased. And even as to the allusion that *we are one body in Christ*; though what the Apostle here intends is equally true of Christians in all circumstances; and the consideration of it is plainly still an additional motive, over and above moral considerations, to the discharge of the several duties and offices of a Christian: yet it is manifest this allusion must have appeared with much greater force to those, who, by the many difficulties they went through for the sake of their religion, were led to keep always in view the relation they stood in to their Saviour, who had undergone the same; to those, who from the idolatries of all around them, and their ill-treatment, were taught to consider themselves as not of the world in which they lived, but as a distinct society of themselves; with laws, and ends, and principles of life and action, quite contrary to those which the world professed themselves at that time influenced by. Hence the relation of a Christian was by them considered as nearer than that of affinity and blood; and they almost literally esteemed themselves as members one of another.

(2) It cannot indeed possibly be denied, that our being God's creatures, and virtue being the natural law we are born under, and the whole constitution of man being plainly adapted to it, are prior obligations to piety and virtue, than the consideration that God sent his Son into the world to save it, and the motives which arise from the peculiar relation of Christians, as members one of another under Christ our head.<sup>2</sup> However, though

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii.

<sup>2</sup> [Butler means that moral obligation does not depend on the beliefs peculiar to Christianity; it is based on man's

all this be allowed, as it expressly is by the inspired writers ; yet it is manifest that Christians at the time of the revelation, and immediately after, could not but insist mostly upon considerations of this latter kind.

(3) These observations show the original particular reference of the text ; and the peculiar force with which the thing intended by the allusion in it, must have been felt by the primitive Christian world. They likewise afford a reason for treating it at this time in a more general way.

(4) The relation which the several parts or members of the natural body have to each other and to the whole body, is here compared to the relation which each particular person in society has to other particular persons and to the whole society : and the latter is intended to be illustrated by the former. And if there be a likeness between these two relations, the consequence is obvious : that the latter shows us we were intended to do good to others, as the former shows us that the several members of the natural body were intended to be instruments of good to each other and to the whole body. But as there is scarce any ground for a comparison between society and the mere material body, this without the mind being a dead unactive thing ; much less can the comparison be carried to any length. And since the Apostle speaks of the several members as having distinct offices, which implies the mind ; it cannot be thought an unallowable liberty, instead of the *body* and *its members*, to substitute the *whole nature of man*, and *all the variety of internal principles which belong to it*. And then the comparison will be between the nature of man as respecting self, and tending to private good, his own preservation and

nature and his relation to God and the Universe—on the truths of “ Natural Religion.” The Christian Revelation may however furnish both an additional motive for obeying the moral law and a deeper insight into its contents.]

happiness ; and the nature of man as having respect to society, and tending to promote public good, the happiness of that society. These ends do indeed perfectly coincide ; and to aim at public and private good are so far from being inconsistent, that they mutually promote each other : yet in the following Discourse they must be considered as entirely distinct ; otherwise the nature of man as tending to one, or as tending to the other, cannot be compared. There can no comparison be made, without considering the things compared as distinct and different.

(5) From this review and comparison of the nature of man as respecting self, and as respecting society, it will plainly appear, that *there are as real and the same kind of indications in human nature, that we were made for society and to do good to our fellow-creatures ; as that we were intended to take care of our own life and health and private good : and that the same objections lie against one of these assertions, as against the other.* For

(6) *First, There is a natural principle of benevolence* <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Suppose a man of learning to be writing a grave book upon *human nature*, and to show in several parts of it that he had an insight into the subject he was considering : amongst other things, the following one would require to be accounted for ; the appearance of benevolence or good-will in men towards each other in the instances of natural relation, and in others (Hobbes of *Human Nature*, ch. ix. sec. 17). Cautious of being deceived with outward show, he retires within himself to see exactly, what that is in the mind of man from whence this appearance proceeds ; and, upon deep reflection, asserts the principle in the mind to be only the love of power, and delight in the exercise of it. Would not everybody think here was a mistake of one word for another ? that the philosopher was contemplating and accounting for some other *human actions*, some other behaviour of man to man ? And could any one be thoroughly satisfied, that what is commonly called benevolence or good-will was really the affection meant, but only by being made to understand that this learned person had a general

in man ; which is in some degree to *society*, what *self-love* is to the *individual*. And if there be in mankind

hypothesis, to which the appearance of good-will could not otherwise be reconciled ? That what has this appearance is often nothing but ambition ; that delight in superiority often (suppose always) mixes itself with benevolence, only makes it more specious to call it ambition than hunger, of the two : but in reality that passion does no more account for the whole appearances of good-will than this appetite does. Is there not often the appearance of one man's wishing that good to another, which he knows himself unable to procure him ; and rejoicing in it, though bestowed by a third person ? And can love of power any way possibly come in to account for this desire or delight ? Is there not often the appearance of men's distinguishing between two or more persons, preferring one before another, to do good to, in cases where love of power cannot in the least account for the distinction and preference ? For this principle can no otherwise distinguish between objects, than as it is a greater instance and exertion of power to do good to one rather than to another. Again, suppose good-will in the mind of man to be nothing but delight in the exercise of power : men might indeed be restrained by distant and accidental considerations ; but these restraints being removed, they would have a disposition to, and delight in mischief as an exercise and proof of power : and this disposition and delight would arise from, or be the same principle in the mind, as a disposition to, and delight in charity. Thus cruelty, as distinct from envy and resentment, would be exactly the same in the mind of man as good-will : that one tends to the happiness, the other to the misery of our fellow-creatures, is, it seems, merely an accidental circumstance, which the mind has not the least regard to. These are the absurdities which even men of capacity run into, when they have occasion to belie their nature, and will perversely disclaim that image of God which was originally stamped upon it ; the traces of which, however faint, are plainly discernible upon the mind of man.

If any person can in earnest doubt, whether there be such a thing as good-will in one man towards another ; (for the question is not concerning either the degree or extensiveness of it, but concerning the affection itself :) let it be observed, that *whether man be thus or otherwise constituted, what is the inward frame in this particular*, is a mere question of fact or natural history, not proveable immediately by

any disposition to friendship ; if there be any such thing as compassion, for compassion is momentary love ; if there be any such thing as the paternal or filial affections ; if there be any affection in human nature, the object and end of which is the good of another ; this is itself benevolence, or the love of another. Be it ever so short, be it in ever so low a degree, or ever so unhappily confined ; it proves the assertion, and points out what we were designed for, as really as though it were in a higher degree and more extensive. I must however remind you that though benevolence and self-love are different ; though the former tends most directly to public good, and the latter to private : yet they are so perfectly coincident, that the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due

reason. It is therefore to be judged of and determined in the same way other facts or matters of natural history are : by appealing to the external senses, or inward perceptions, respectively, as the matter under consideration is cognizable by one or the other : by arguing from acknowledged facts and actions ; for a great number of actions of the same kind, in different circumstances, and respecting different objects, will prove to a certainty, what principles they do not, and, to the greatest probability, what principles they do proceed from : and lastly, by the testimony of mankind. Now that there is some degree of benevolence amongst men, may be as strongly and plainly proved in all these ways, as it could possibly be proved, supposing there was this affection in our nature. And should any one think fit to assert, that resentment in the mind of man was absolutely nothing but reasonable concern for our own safety, the falsity of this, and what is the real nature of that passion, could be shown in no other ways than those in which it may be shown, that there is such a thing in *some degree* as *real* good-will in man towards man. It is sufficient that the seeds of it be implanted in our nature by God. There is, it is owned, much left for us to do upon our own heart and temper ; to cultivate, to improve, to call it forth, to exercise it in a steady, uniform manner. This is our work : this is virtue and religion.

degree ; and that self-love is one chief security of our right behaviour towards society. It may be added, that their mutual coinciding, so that we can scarce promote one without the other, is equally a proof that we were made for both.

(7) *Secondly*, This will further appear from observing that the *several passions and affections*, which are distinct <sup>1</sup> both from benevolence and self-love, do in general

<sup>1</sup> Everybody makes a distinction between self-love, and the several particular passions, appetites, and affections ; and yet they are often confounded again. That they are totally different will be seen by any one who will distinguish between the passions and appetites *themselves*, and *endeavouring* after the means of their gratification. Consider the appetite of hunger, and the desire of esteem : these being the occasion both of pleasure and pain, the coolest *self-love*, as well as the appetites and passions themselves, may put us upon making use of the *proper methods of obtaining* that pleasure, and avoiding that pain ; but the *feelings themselves*, the pain of hunger and shame, and the delight from esteem, are no more self-love than they are anything in the world. Though a man hated himself, he would as much feel the pain of hunger as he would that of the gout : and it is plainly supposable there may be creatures with self-love in them to the highest degree, who may be quite insensible and indifferent (as men in some cases are) to the contempt and esteem of those, upon whom their happiness does not in some further respects depend. And as self-love and the several particular passions and appetites are in themselves totally different ; so, that some actions proceed from one, and some from the other, will be manifest to any who will observe the two following very supposable cases. One man rushes upon certain ruin for the gratification of a present desire : nobody will call the principle of this action self-love. Suppose another man to go through some laborious work upon promise of a great reward, without any distinct knowledge what the reward will be : this course of action cannot be ascribed to any particular passion. The former of these actions is plainly to be imputed to some particular passion or affection, the latter as plainly to the general affection or principle of self-love. That there are some particular pursuits or actions concerning which we cannot determine how far they are owing to one, and how

contribute and lead us to *public* good as really as to *private*. It might be thought too minute and particular, and would carry us too great a length, to distinguish between and compare together the several passions or appetites distinct from benevolence, whose primary use and intention is the security and good of society; and the passions distinct from self-love, whose primary intention and design is the security and good of the individual.<sup>1</sup> It is enough to the present argument, that desire of esteem from others, contempt and esteem of them, love of society as distinct from affection to the good of it, indignation against successful vice, that these are public affections or passions; have an immediate respect to others, naturally lead us to regulate our behaviour in such a manner as will be of service to our fellow-creatures. If any or all of these may be considered likewise as private affections, as tending to private good; this does not hinder them from being public affections too, or destroy the good influence of them upon society, and their tendency to public good. It may be added, that as persons without any conviction from reason

far to the other, proceeds from this, that the two principles are frequently mixed together, and run up into each other. This distinction is further explained in the eleventh Sermon.

<sup>1</sup> If any desire to see this distinction and comparison made in a particular instance, the appetite and passion now mentioned may serve for one. Hunger is to be considered as a private appetite; because the end for which it was given us is the preservation of the individual. Desire of esteem is a public passion; because the end for which it was given us is to regulate our behaviour towards society. The respect which this has to private good is as remote as the respect that has to public good: and the appetite is no more self-love, than the passion is benevolence. The object and end of the former is merely food; the object and end of the latter is merely esteem: but the latter can no more be gratified, without contributing to the good of society; than the former can be gratified, without contributing to the preservation of the individual.

of the desirableness of life, would yet of course preserve it merely from the appetite of hunger ; so by acting merely from regard (suppose) to reputation, without any consideration of the good of others, men often contribute to public good. In both these instances they are plainly instruments in the hands of another, in the hands of Providence, to carry on ends, the preservation of the individual and good of society, which they themselves have not in their view or intention. The sum is, men have various appetites, passions, and particular affections, quite distinct both from self-love and from benevolence : all of these have a tendency to promote both public and private good, and may be considered as respecting others and ourselves equally and in common : but some of them seem most immediately to respect others, or tend to public good ; others of them most immediately to respect self, or tend to private good : as the former are not benevolence, so the latter are not self-love : neither sort are instances of our love either to ourselves or others ; but only instances of our Maker's care and love both of the individual and the species, and proofs that he intended we should be instruments of good to each other, as well as that we should be so to ourselves.

(8) *Thirdly*, There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions. We are plainly constituted such sort of creatures as to reflect upon our own nature. The mind can take a view of what passes within itself, its propensities, aversions, passions, affections, as respecting such objects, and in such degrees ; and of the several actions consequent thereupon. In this survey it approves of one, disapproves of another, and towards a third is affected in neither of these ways, but is quite indifferent. This principle in man, by which he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions, is conscience ; for this is the

strict sense of the word, though sometimes it is used so as to take in more. And that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each other, and leads them to do good, is too manifest to need being insisted upon. Thus a parent has the affection of love to his children : this leads him to take care of, to educate, to make due provision for them ; the natural affection leads to this : but the reflection that it is his proper business, what belongs to him, that it is right and commendable so to do ; this added to the affection becomes a much more settled principle, and carries him on through more labour and difficulties for the sake of his children, than he would undergo from that affection alone, if he thought it, and the course of action it led to, either indifferent or criminal. This indeed is impossible, to do that which is good and not to approve of it ; for which reason they are frequently not considered as distinct, though they really are : for men often approve of the actions of others, which they will not imitate, and likewise do that which they approve not. It cannot possibly be denied, that there is this principle of reflection or conscience in human nature. Suppose a man to relieve an innocent person in great distress ; suppose the same man afterwards, in the fury of anger, to do the greatest mischief to a person who had given no just cause of offence ; to aggravate the injury, add the circumstances of former friendship, and obligation from the injured person ; let the man who is supposed to have done these two different actions, coolly reflect upon them afterwards, without regard to their consequences to himself : to assert that any common man would be affected in the same way towards these different actions, that he would make no distinction between them, but approve or disapprove them equally, is too glaring a falsity to need being confuted. There is therefore this principle

of reflection or conscience in mankind. It is needless to compare the respect it has to private good, with the respect it has to public ; since it plainly tends as much to the latter as to the former, and is commonly thought to tend chiefly to the latter. This faculty is now mentioned merely as another part in the inward frame of man, pointing out to us in some degree what we are intended for, and as what will naturally and of course have some influence. The particular place assigned to it by nature, what authority it has, and how great influence it ought to have, shall be hereafter considered.

(9) From this comparison of benevolence and self-love, of our public and private affections, of the courses of life they lead to, and of the principle of reflection or conscience as respecting each of them, it is as manifest, that *we were made for society, and to promote the happiness of it ; as that we were intended to take care of our own life, and health, and private good.*

(10) And from this whole review must be given a different draught of human nature from what we are often presented with. Mankind are by nature so closely united, there is such a correspondence between the inward sensations of one man and those of another, that disgrace is as much avoided as bodily pain, and to be the object of esteem and love as much desired as any external goods : and in many particular cases, persons are carried on to do good to others, as the end their affection tends to and rests in ; and manifest that they find real satisfaction and enjoyment in this course of behaviour. There is such a natural principle of attraction in man towards man, that having trod the same tract of land, having breathed in the same climate, barely having been born in the same artificial district or division, becomes the occasion of contracting acquaintances and familiarities many years after : for anything may serve the purpose.

Thus relations merely nominal are sought and invented, not by governors, but by the lowest of the people ; which are found sufficient to hold mankind together in little fraternities and copartnerships : weak ties indeed, and what may afford fund enough for ridicule, if they are absurdly considered as the real principles of that union : but they are in truth merely the occasions, as anything may be of anything, upon which our nature carries us on according to its own previous bent and bias ; which occasions therefore would be nothing at all, were there not this prior disposition and bias of nature. Men are so much one body, that in a peculiar manner they feel for each other, shame, sudden danger, resentment, honour, prosperity, distress ; one or another, or all of these, from the social nature in general, from benevolence, upon the occasion of natural relation, acquaintance, protection, dependence ; each of these being distinct cements of society. And therefore to have no restraint from, no regard to others in our behaviour, is the speculative absurdity of considering ourselves as single and independent, as having nothing in our nature which has respect to our fellow-creatures, reduced to action and practice. And this is the same absurdity, as to suppose a hand, or any part to have no natural respect to any other, or to the whole body.

(11) But allowing all this, it may be asked, “ Has not man dispositions and principles within which lead him to do evil to others, as well as to do good ? Whence come the many miseries else, which men are the authors and instruments of to each other ? ” These questions, so far as they relate to the foregoing discourse, may be answered by asking, Has not man also dispositions and principles within, which lead him to do evil to himself as well as good ? Whence come the many miseries else, sickness, pain, and death, which men are the instruments and authors of to themselves ?

(12) It may be thought more easy to answer one of these questions than the other, but the answer to both is really the same ; that mankind have ungoverned passions which they will gratify at any rate, as well to the injury of others, as in contradiction to known private interest : but that as there is no such thing as self-hatred, so neither is there any such thing as ill-will in one man towards another, emulation and resentment being away ; whereas there is plainly benevolence or good-will : there is no such thing as love of injustice, oppression, treachery, ingratitude ; but only eager desires after such and such external goods : which, according to a very ancient observation, the most abandoned would choose to obtain by innocent means, if they were as easy, and as effectual to their end : that even emulation and resentment, by any one who will consider what these passions really are in nature,<sup>1</sup> will be found nothing to the purpose of this objection : and that the principles and passions in the mind of man, which are distinct both from self-love and benevolence, primarily and most directly lead to right behaviour with regard to others as well as himself, and only secondarily and accidentally to what is evil. Thus, though men, to avoid the shame of one villainy, are

<sup>1</sup> Emulation is merely the desire and hope of equality with or superiority over others, with whom we compare ourselves. There does not appear to be any *other grief* in the natural passion, but only *that want* which is implied in desire. However this may be so strong as to be the occasion of great *grief*. To desire the attainment of this equality or superiority by the *particular means* of others being brought down to our own level, or below it, is, I think, the distinct notion of envy. From whence it is easy to see, that the real end, which the natural passion emulation, and which the unlawful one envy aims at, is exactly the same ; namely, that equality or superiority : and consequently, that to do mischief is not the end of envy, but merely the means it makes use of to attain its end. As to resentment, see the eighth Sermon.

sometimes guilty of a greater, yet it is easy to see, that the original tendency of shame is to prevent the doing of shameful actions ; and its leading men to conceal such actions when done, is only in consequence of their being done, *i.e.* of the passion's not having answered its first end.

(13) If it be said, that there are persons in the world who are in great measure without the natural affections towards their fellow-creatures : there are likewise instances of persons without the common natural affections to themselves : but the nature of man is not to be judged of by either of these, but by what appears in the common world, in the bulk of mankind.

(14) I am afraid it would be thought very strange, if to confirm the truth of this account of human nature, and make out the justness of the foregoing comparison, it should be added, that from what appears, men in fact as much and as often contradict that *part* of their nature which respects *self*, and which leads them to their *own private* good and happiness ; as they contradict that *part* of it which respects *society*, and tends to *public* good : that there are as few persons who attain the greatest satisfaction and enjoyment which they might attain in the present world, as who do the greatest good to others which they might do : nay, that there are as few who can be said really and in earnest to aim at one, as at the other. Take a survey of mankind : the world in general, the good and bad, almost without exception, equally are agreed, that were religion out of the case, the happiness of the present life would consist in a manner wholly in riches, honours, sensual gratifications ; insomuch that one scarce hears a reflection made upon prudence, life, conduct, but upon this supposition. Yet, on the contrary, that persons in the greatest affluence of fortune are no happier than such as have only a competency ; that

the cares and disappointments of ambition for the most part far exceed the satisfactions of it ; as also the miserable intervals of intemperance and excess, and the many untimely deaths occasioned by a dissolute course of life : these things are all seen, acknowledged, by every one acknowledged ; but are thought no objections against, though they expressly contradict, this universal principle that the happiness of the present life consists in one or other of them. Whence is all this absurdity and contradiction ? Is not the middle way obvious ? Can anything be more manifest, than that the happiness of life consists in these possessed and enjoyed only to a certain degree ; that to pursue them beyond this degree is always attended with more inconvenience than advantage to a man's self, and often with extreme misery and unhappiness. Whence then, I say, is all this absurdity and contradiction ? Is it really the result of consideration in mankind, how they may become most easy to themselves, most free from care, and enjoy the chief happiness attainable in this world ? Or is it not manifestly owing either to this, that they have not cool and reasonable concern enough for themselves to consider wherein their chief happiness in the present life consists, or else, if they do consider it, that they will not act conformably to what is the result of that consideration : *i.e.* reasonable concern for themselves, or cool self-love is prevailed over by passion and appetite. So that from what appears, there is no ground to assert that those principles in the nature of man, which most directly lead to promote the good of our fellow-creatures, are more generally or in a greater degree violated, than those, which most directly lead us to promote our own private good and happiness.

(15) The sum of the whole is plainly this. The nature of man considered in his single capacity, and with respect only to the present world, is adapted and leads him to

attain the greatest happiness he can for himself in the present world. The nature of man, considered in his public or social capacity, leads him to a right behaviour in society, to that course of life which we call virtue. Men follow or obey their nature in both these capacities and respects to a certain degree, but not entirely ; their actions do not come up to the whole of what their nature leads them to in either of these capacities or respects ; and they often violate their nature in both, *i.e.* as they neglect the duties they owe to their fellow-creatures, to which their nature leads them ; and are injurious, to which their nature is abhorrent ; so there is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification ; for the sake of which they negligently, nay, even knowingly are the authors and instruments of their own misery and ruin. Thus they are as often unjust to themselves as to others, and for the most part are equally so to both by the same actions.

## SERMON II.—UPON HUMAN NATURE

### ANALYSIS

Assume the principle that if the nature of a creature is adapted to certain purposes it was intended for those purposes. In spite of some possibilities of error and slight variations, the general constitution of human nature may be certainly known. § 1.

The elements of human nature have been described in Serm. I. § 2.

Objection: The argument so far proves nothing, for all men are actuated by some part of their nature, and one who acts on the dominant impulse of the moment is following his nature. § 3.

Reply: There are several possible meanings of "following nature." It may mean:—

- (a) To follow any principle of human nature.
- (b) To follow the strongest passion.
- (c) To act in conformity with human nature taken as a whole. This is the true meaning and involves the recognition of the supremacy of Conscience. §§ 4-8.

Functions of Conscience: to reflect on actions and motives, to pass judgment on them, to pass judgment on the agent, to point to a Divine Judgment. § 8.

It is in virtue of the possession of Conscience that man is a "law to himself." § 9.

An illustration to show that one principle of human nature may be superior to another drawn from conflict between passion and reasonable Self-love. §§ 10, 11.

In the same way Conscience is a superior principle. Its

higher authority, when in conflict with passion, may be recognized, quite apart from the question of its strength, from a consideration of the constitution of human nature.

§§ 12, 13.

There is a distinction between *power* and *authority* here as in a society. That it ought to rule is a part of the idea of Conscience—its natural right. §§ 14, 15.

The view that there is no distinction between principles of human nature except their relative strength takes away the rational ground of moral judgment, and therefore leads to absurdity. §§ 16, 17.

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“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.”—ROM. ii. 14.

(1) As speculative truth admits of different kinds of proof, so likewise moral obligations may be shown by different methods. If the real nature of any creature leads him and is adapted to such and such purposes only, or more than to any other ; this is a reason to believe the Author of that nature intended it for those purposes.<sup>1</sup> Thus there is no doubt the eye was intended for us to see with. And the more complex any constitution is, and the greater variety of parts there are which thus tend to some one end, the stronger is the proof that such end was designed. However, when the inward frame of man is considered as any guide in morals, the utmost caution must be used that none make peculiarities in their own temper, or anything which is the effect of

<sup>1</sup> [This is a statement of the principle of argument from “final causes,” *i.e.* from the purpose or end to which a thing is adapted (cf. Pref. § 14, Serm. IV. § 7 and Serm. VI. § 1). Butler’s formulation of the principle introduces the idea of an intelligent Creator. It may be put without specific reference to a Designer. Aristotle uses the same idea when he argues that the true function of man is determined by his nature (cf. *Eth. Nic.* i. 7).]

particular customs, though observable in several, the standard of what is common to the species ; and above all, that the highest principle be not forgot or excluded, that to which belongs the adjustment and correction of all other inward movements and affections : which principle will of course have some influence, but which being in nature supreme, as shall now be shown, ought to preside over and govern all the rest. The difficulty of rightly observing the two former cautions ; the appearance there is of some small diversity amongst mankind with respect to this faculty, with respect to their natural sense of moral good and evil ; and the attention necessary to survey with any exactness what passes within, have occasioned that it is not so much agreed what is the standard of the internal nature of man, as of his external form. Neither is this last exactly settled. Yet we understand one another when we speak of the shape of a human body : so likewise we do when we speak of the heart and inward principles, how far soever the standard is from being exact or precisely fixed. There is therefore ground for an attempt of showing men to themselves, of showing them what course of life and behaviour their real nature points out and would lead them to. Now obligations of virtue shown, and motives to the practice of it enforced, from a review of the nature of man, are to be considered as an appeal to each particular person's heart and natural conscience : as the external senses are appealed to for the proof of things cognizable by them. Since then our inward feelings, and the perceptions we receive from our external senses are equally real ; to argue from the former to life and conduct is as little liable to exception, as to argue from the latter to absolute speculative truth. A man can as little doubt whether his eyes were given him to see with, as he can doubt of the truth of the science of *optics* deduced from

ocular experiments. And allowing the inward feeling, shame ; a man can as little doubt whether it was given him to prevent his doing shameful actions, as he can doubt whether his eyes were given him to guide his steps. And as to these inward feelings themselves ; that they are real, that man has in his nature passions and affections, can no more be questioned, than that he has external senses. Neither can the former be wholly mistaken ; though to a certain degree liable to greater mistakes than the latter.

(2) There can be no doubt but that several propensions or instincts, several principles in the heart of man, carry him to society, and to contribute to the happiness of it, in a sense and a manner in which no inward principle leads him to evil. These principles, propensions or instincts which lead him to do good, are approved of by a certain faculty within, quite distinct from these propensions themselves. All this hath been fully made out in the foregoing Discourse.

(3) But it may be said, “ What is all this, though true, to the purpose of virtue and religion ? These require, not only that we do good to others when we are led this way, by benevolence or reflection, happening to be stronger than other principles, passions, or appetites ; but likewise that the *whole* character be formed upon thought and reflection ; that *every* action be directed by some determinate rule, some other rule than the strength and prevalency of any principle or passion. What sign is there in our nature (for the inquiry is only about what is to be collected from thence) that this was intended by its Author ? Or how does so various and fickle a temper as that of man appear adapted thereto ? It may indeed be absurd and unnatural for men to act without any reflection ; nay, without regard to that particular kind of reflection which you call conscience ;

because this does belong to our nature. For as there never was a man but who approved one place, prospect, building, before another : so it does not appear that there ever was a man who would not have approved an action of humanity rather than of cruelty ; interest and passion being quite out of the case. But interest and passion do come in, and are often too strong for and prevail over reflection and conscience. Now as brutes have various instincts, by which they are carried on to the end the Author of their nature intended them for : is not man in the same condition ; with this difference only, that to his instincts (*i.e.* appetites and passions) is added the principle of reflection or conscience ? And as brutes act agreeably to their nature, in following that principle or particular instinct which for the present is strongest in them : does not man likewise act agreeably to his nature, or obey the law of his creation, by following that principle, be it passion or conscience, which for the present happens to be strongest in him ? Thus different men are by their particular nature hurried on to pursue honour, or riches, or pleasure : there are also persons whose temper leads them in an uncommon degree to kindness, compassion, doing good to their fellow-creatures : as there are others who are given to suspend their judgment, to weigh and consider things, and to act upon thought and reflection. Let every one then quietly follow his nature ; as passion, reflection, appetite, the several parts of it, happen to be strongest : but let not the man of virtue take upon him to blame the ambitious, the covetous, the dissolute ; since these equally with him obey and follow their nature. Thus, as in some cases we follow our nature in doing the works *contained in the law*, so in other cases we follow nature in doing contrary."

(4) Now all this licentious talk entirely goes upon a supposition, that men follow their nature in the same

sense, in violating the known rules of justice and honesty for the sake of a present gratification, as they do in following those rules when they have no temptation to the contrary. And if this were true, that could not be so which St. *Paul* asserts, that men are *by nature a law to themselves*. If by following nature were meant only acting as we please, it would indeed be ridiculous to speak of nature as any guide in morals : nay, the very mention of deviating from nature would be absurd ; and the mention of following it, when spoken by way of distinction, would absolutely have no meaning. For did ever any one act otherwise than as he pleased ? And yet the ancients speak of deviating from nature as vice ; and of following nature so much as a distinction, that according to them the perfection of virtue consists therein. So that language itself should teach people another sense to the words *following nature*, than barely acting as we please. Let it however be observed, that though the words *human nature* are to be explained, yet the real question of this Discourse is not concerning the meaning of words, any otherwise than as the explanation of them may be needful to make out and explain the assertion, that *every man is naturally a law to himself*, that *every one may find within himself the rule of right, and obligations to follow it*. This St. *Paul* affirms in the words of the text, and this the foregoing objection really denies by seeming to allow it. And the objection will be fully answered, and the text before us explained, by observing that *nature* is considered in different views, and the word used in different senses ; and by showing in what view it is considered, and in what sense the word is used, when intended to express and signify that which is the guide of life, that by which men are a law to themselves. I say, the explanation of the term will be sufficient, because from thence it will appear, that in some senses of the word,

*nature* cannot be, but that in another sense it manifestly is, a law to us.

(5) I. By *nature* is often meant no more than some principle in man, without regard either to the kind or degree of it. Thus the passion of anger, and the affection of parents to their children, would be called equally *natural*. And as the same person hath often contrary principles, which at the same time draw contrary ways, he may by the same action both follow and contradict his nature in this sense of the word ; he may follow one passion and contradict another.

(6) II. *Nature* is frequently spoken of as consisting in those passions which are strongest, and most influence the actions ; which being vicious ones, mankind is in this sense naturally vicious, or vicious by nature. Thus St. *Paul* says of the *Gentiles*, *who were dead in trespasses and sins, and walked according to the spirit of disobedience, that they were by nature the children of wrath*.<sup>1</sup> They could be no otherwise *children of wrath* by nature, than they were vicious by nature.

(7) Here then are two different senses of the word *nature*, in neither of which men can at all be said to be a law to themselves. They are mentioned only to be excluded ; to prevent their being confounded, as the latter is in the objection, with another sense of it, which is now to be inquired after and explained.

(8) III. The apostle asserts, that the *Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law*. Nature is indeed here put by way of distinction from revelation, but yet it is not a mere negative. He intends to express more than that by which they *did not*, that by which they *did* the works of the law ; namely, by *nature*. It is plain the meaning of the word is not the same in this passage as in the former, where it is spoken of as evil ; for in this

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. ii. 3.

latter it is spoken of as good ; as that by which they acted, or might have acted virtuously. What that is in man by which he is *naturally a law to himself*, is explained in the following words : *Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* If there be a distinction to be made between the *works written in their hearts* and the *witness of conscience* ; by the former must be meant the natural dispositions to kindness and compassion, to do what is of good report, to which this apostle often refers : that part of the nature of man, treated of in the foregoing Discourse, which with very little reflection and of course leads him to society, and by means of which he naturally acts a just and good part in it, unless other passions or interests lead him astray. Yet since other passions, and regards to private interest, which lead us (though indirectly, yet they lead us) astray, are themselves in a degree equally natural, and often most prevalent ; and since we have no method of seeing the particular degrees in which one or the other is placed in us by nature ; it is plain the former, considered merely as natural, good and right as they are, can no more be a law to us than the latter. But there is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of his heart, as well as his external actions : which passes judgment upon himself and them ; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good ; others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust : which, without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him, the doer of them, accordingly : and which, if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always of course goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own.

But this part of the office of conscience is beyond my present design explicitly to consider. It is by this faculty, natural to man, that he is a moral agent, that he is a law to himself : but this faculty, I say, not to be considered merely as a principle in his heart, which is to have some influence as well as others ; but considered as a faculty in kind and in nature supreme over all others, and which bears its own authority of being so.

(9) This *prerogative*, this *natural supremacy*, of the faculty which surveys, approves or disapproves the several affections of our mind and actions of our lives, being that by which men *are a law to themselves*, their conformity or disobedience to which law of our nature renders their actions, in the highest and most proper sense, natural or unnatural ; it is fit it be further explained to you : and I hope it will be so, if you will attend to the following reflections.

(10) Man may act according to that principle or inclination which for the present happens to be strongest, and yet act in a way disproportionate to, and violate his real proper nature. Suppose a brute creature by any bait to be allured into a snare, by which he is destroyed. He plainly followed the bent of his nature, leading him to gratify his appetite : there is an entire correspondence between his whole nature and such an action : such action therefore is natural. But suppose a man, foreseeing the same danger of certain ruin, should rush into it for the sake of a present gratification : he in this instance would follow his strongest desire, as did the brute creature : but there would be as manifest a disproportion, between the nature of a man and such an action, as between the meanest work of art and the skill of the greatest master in that art : which disproportion arises, not from considering the action singly in *itself* or in its *consequences* ; but from *comparison* of it with the

nature of the agent. And since such an action is utterly disproportionate to the nature of man, it is in the strictest and most proper sense unnatural; this word expressing that disproportion. Therefore instead of the words *disproportionate to his nature*, the word *unnatural* may now be put; this being more familiar to us: but let it be observed, that it stands for the same thing precisely.

(II) Now what is it which renders such a rash action unnatural? Is it that he went against the principle of reasonable and cool self-love, considered *merely* as a part of his nature? No: for if he had acted the contrary way, he would equally have gone against a principle or part of his nature, namely, passion or appetite. But to deny a present appetite, from foresight that the gratification of it would end in immediate ruin or extreme misery, is by no means an unnatural action: whereas to contradict or go against cool self-love for the sake of such gratification, is so in the instance before us. Such an action then being unnatural; and its being so not arising from a man's going against a principle or desire barely, nor in going against that principle or desire which happens for the present to be strongest; it necessarily follows, that there must be some other difference or distinction to be made between these two principles, passion and cool self-love, than what I have yet taken notice of. And this difference, not being a difference in strength or degree, I call a difference in *nature* and in *kind*. And since, in the instance still before us, if passion prevails over self-love, the consequent action is unnatural; but if self-love prevails over passion, the action is natural: it is manifest that self-love is in human nature a superior principle to passion. This may be contradicted without violating that nature; but the former cannot. So that, if we will act conformably to the economy of man's nature, reasonable self-love must govern. Thus, without

particular consideration of conscience, we may have a clear conception of the *superior nature* of one inward principle to another ; and see that there really is this natural superiority, quite distinct from degrees of strength and prevalency.

(12) Let us now take a view of the nature of man, as consisting partly of various appetites, passions, affections, and partly of the principle of reflection or conscience ; leaving quite out all consideration of the different degrees of strength, in which either of them prevail, and it will further appear that there is this natural superiority of one inward principle to another, or that it is even part of the idea of reflection or conscience.

(13) Passion or appetite implies a direct simple tendency towards such and such objects, without distinction of the means by which they are to be obtained. Consequently it will often happen there will be a desire of particular objects, in cases where they cannot be obtained without manifest injury to others. Reflection or conscience comes in, and disapproves the pursuit of them in these circumstances ; but the desire remains. Which is to be obeyed, appetite or reflection ? Cannot this question be answered, from the economy and constitution of human nature merely, without saying which is strongest ? Or need this at all come into consideration ? Would not the question be *intelligibly* and fully answered by saying, that the principle of reflection or conscience being compared with the various appetites, passions and affections in men, the former is manifestly superior and chief, without regard to strength. And how often soever the latter happens to prevail, it is mere *usurpation* : the former remains in nature and in kind its superior ; and every instance of such prevalence of the latter is an instance of breaking in upon and violation of the constitution of man.

(14) All this is no more than the distinction, which everybody is acquainted with, between *mere power* and *authority* : only instead of being intended to express the difference between what is possible, and what is lawful in civil government ; here it has been shown applicable to the several principles in the mind of man. Thus that principle, by which we survey, and either approve or disapprove our own heart, temper and actions, is not only to be considered as what is in its turn to have some influence ; which may be said of every passion, of the lowest appetites : but likewise as being superior ; as from its very nature manifestly claiming superiority over all others ; insomuch that you cannot form a notion of this faculty, conscience, without taking in judgment, direction, superintendency. This is a constituent part of the idea, that is, of the faculty itself : and to preside and govern, from the very economy and constitution of man, belongs to it. Had it strength, as it has right : had it power, as it has manifest authority ; it would absolutely govern the world.

(15) This gives us a further view of the nature of man ; shows us what course of life we were made for : not only that our real nature leads us to be influenced in some degree by reflection and conscience ; but likewise in what degree we are to be influenced by it, if we will fall in with, and act agreeably to the constitution of our nature : that this faculty was placed within to be our proper governor ; to direct and regulate all under principles, passions and motives of action. This is its right and office : thus sacred is its authority. And how often soever men violate and rebelliously refuse to submit to it, for supposed interest which they cannot otherwise obtain, or for the sake of passion which they cannot otherwise gratify ; this makes no alteration as to the *natural right* and *office* of conscience.

(16) Let us now turn this whole matter another way, and suppose there was no such thing at all as this natural supremacy of conscience ; that there was no distinction to be made between one inward principle and another, but only that of strength ; and see what would be the consequence.

(17) Consider then what is the latitude and compass of the actions of man with regard to himself, his fellow-creatures and the Supreme Being ? What are their bounds, besides that of our natural power ? With respect to the two first, they are plainly no other than these : no man seeks misery as such for himself ; and no one unprovoked<sup>1</sup> does mischief to another for its own sake. For in every degree within these bounds, mankind knowingly, from passion or wantonness, bring ruin and misery upon themselves and others. And impiety and profaneness, I mean, what every one would call so who believes the being of God, have absolutely no bounds at all. Men blaspheme the Author of Nature, formally and in words renounce their allegiance to their Creator. Put an instance then with respect to any one of these three. Though we should suppose profane swearing, and in general that kind of impiety now mentioned, to mean nothing, yet it implies wanton disregard and irreverence towards an infinite Being our Creator ; and is this as suitable to the nature of man, as reverence and dutiful submission of heart towards that Almighty Being ? Or suppose a man guilty of parricide, with all the circumstances of cruelty which such an action can admit of. This action is done in consequence of its principle being for the present strongest : and if there be no difference between inward principles, but only that of strength ; the strength being given, you have the whole nature of

<sup>1</sup> [The 2nd edition has "provoked," which seems to be a misprint.]

the man given, so far as it relates to this matter. The action plainly corresponds to the principle, the principle being in that degree of strength it was : it therefore corresponds to the whole nature of the man. Upon comparing the action and the whole nature, there arises no disproportion, there appears no unsuitableness between them. Thus the *murder of a father* and the *nature of man* correspond to each other, as the same nature and an act of filial duty. If there be no difference between inward principles, but only that of strength ; we can make no distinction between these two actions, considered as the actions of such a creature ; but in our coolest hours must approve or disapprove them equally : than which nothing can be reduced to a greater absurdity.

### SERMON III.—UPON HUMAN NATURE

#### ANALYSIS

Having shown the supremacy of Conscience, we can see what is meant by "human nature" when it is said that "virtue consists in following nature." It denotes the whole constitution of man and resembles an organized society in that it consists of subordinates under a supreme authority, *i.e.* the passions under the authority of Conscience. §§ 1, 2. Thus, apart from Revelation, man has the moral law within himself. In practice, the dictates of this law are almost always clear. §§ 3, 4.

Why are we under an obligation to obey the moral law ? Because it is the law of our nature. Conscience bears witness to itself that it is our natural guide. § 5.

An objection against obeying the law of our nature : Why not pursue our own happiness without regard to the restraints of conscience ? § 6.

Reply : All enjoyments depend on our relations with our fellows. Restraints of some kind are necessary in any manner of life, in a vicious life as well as in a virtuous one. § 7.

Modified objection : Why not endure only those restraints which promote our own happiness ?

Reply : This will not lead us far wrong if we remember that compassion and benevolence and virtue in general are more conducive to the happiness of the individual than vice ; and that this is particularly the case where virtue has become habitual.

On the whole, duty and self-interest are seldom really inconsistent in this life. Any exceptions to the coincidence of duty and interest will be set right in the future,

for this is implied in the idea of the moral government of the world. § 8.

Conclusion : Short summary of the argument of Sermons II. and III. § 9.

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“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.”—ROM. ii. 14.

(1) THE natural supremacy of reflection or conscience being thus established ; we may from it form a distinct notion of what is meant by *human nature*, when virtue is said to consist in following it, and vice in deviating from it.

(2) As the idea of a civil constitution implies in it united strength, various subordinations, under one direction, that of the supreme authority ; the different strength of each particular member of the society not coming into the idea : whereas, if you leave out the subordination, the union, and the one direction, you destroy and lose it : so reason, several appetites, passions and affections, prevailing in different degrees of strength, is not *that* idea or notion of *human nature* ; but *that nature* consists in these several principles considered as having a natural respect to each other, in the several passions being naturally subordinate to the one superior principle of reflection or conscience. Every bias, instinct, propension within, is a real part of our nature, but not the whole : add to these the superior faculty, whose office it is to adjust, manage and preside over them, and take in this its natural superiority, and you complete the idea of human nature. And as in civil government the constitution is broken in upon and violated by power and strength prevailing over authority ; so the constitution of man is broken in upon and violated by the lower faculties or principles within prevailing over that which is in its nature supreme over them all. Thus, when it is said by ancient writers, that tortures and death

are not so contrary to human nature as injustice,<sup>1</sup> by this to be sure is not meant, that the aversion to the former in mankind is less strong and prevalent than their aversion to the latter : but that the former is only contrary to our nature considered in a partial view, and which takes in only the lowest part of it, that which we have in common with the brutes ; whereas the latter is contrary to our nature, considered in a higher sense, as a system and constitution contrary to the whole economy of man.<sup>2</sup>

(3) And from all these things put together, nothing

<sup>1</sup> [Cf. Pref. § 13.]

<sup>2</sup> Every man in his physical nature is one individual single agent. He has likewise properties and principles, each of which may be considered separately, and without regard to the respects which they have to each other. Neither of these are the nature we are taking a view of. But it is the inward frame of man considered as a *system* or *constitution* : whose several parts are united, not by a physical principle of individuation, but by the respects they have to each other ; the chief of which is the subjection which the appetites, passions and particular affections have to the one supreme principle of reflection or conscience. The system or constitution is formed by and consists in these respects and this subjection. Thus the body is a *system* or *constitution* : so is a tree : so is every machine. Consider all the several parts of a tree without the natural respects they have to each other, and you have not at all the idea of a tree ; but add these respects, and this gives you the idea. The body may be impaired by sickness, a tree may decay, a machine be out of order, and yet the system and constitution of them not totally dissolved. There is plainly somewhat which answers to all this in the moral constitution of man. Whoever will consider his own nature, will see that the several appetites, passions and particular affections have different respects amongst themselves. They are restraints upon, and are in a proportion to each other. This proportion is just and perfect, when all those under principles are perfectly coincident with conscience, so far as their nature permits, and in all cases under its absolute and entire direction. The least excess or defect, the least alteration of the due proportions amongst themselves, or of their coincidence with conscience, though not proceeding into action, is some degree

can be more evident, than that, exclusive of revelation, man cannot be considered as a creature left by his Maker to act at random, and live at large up to the extent of his natural power, as passion, humour, wilfulness, happen to carry him ; which is the condition brute creatures are in : but that *from his make, constitution, or nature, he is in the strictest and most proper sense a law to himself*. He hath the rule of right within : what is wanting is only that he honestly attend to it.

(4) The inquiries which have been made by men of leisure after some general rule, the conformity to, or disagreement from which, should denominate our actions good or evil, are in many respects of great service. Yet let any plain honest man, before he engages in any course of action, ask himself, Is this I am going about right, or is it wrong ? Is it good, or is it evil ? I do not in the least doubt but that this question would be answered agreeably to truth and virtue, by almost any fair man in almost any circumstance.<sup>1</sup> Neither do there appear any cases which look like exceptions to this ; but those of superstition, and

of disorder in the moral constitution. But perfection, though plainly intelligible and supposable, was never attained by any man. If the higher principle of reflection maintains its place, and as much as it can corrects that disorder, and hinders it from breaking out into action, this is all that can be expected from such a creature as man. And though the appetites and passions have not their exact due proportion to each other ; though they often strive for mastery with judgment or reflection : yet, since the superiority of this principle to all others is the chief respect which forms the constitution, so far as this superiority is maintained, the character, the man, is good, worthy, virtuous.

<sup>1</sup> [Dr. Bernard points out that Butler speaks with less confidence in the *Analogy* on the clearness of the dictates of Conscience. He there asserts that vicious habits may make it hard to see where duty lies (*Anal.* i. 4), and suggests that difficulty in discovering the right course of action may be an essential part of some men's "state of probation" (*Anal.* ii. 6). This may indicate some slight modification

of partiality to ourselves. Superstition may perhaps be somewhat of an exception : but partiality to ourselves is not ; this being itself dishonesty. For a man to judge that to be the equitable, the moderate, the right part for him to act, which he would see to be hard, unjust, oppressive in another ; this is plain vice, and can proceed only from great unfairness of mind.

(5) But allowing that mankind hath the rule of right within himself, yet it may be asked, “ What obligations are we under to attend to and follow it ? ” I answer : it has been proved that man by his nature is a law to himself, without the particular distinct consideration of the positive sanctions of that law ; the rewards and punishments which we feel, and those which from the light of reason we have ground to believe, are annexed to it. The question then carries its own answer along with it. Your obligation to obey this law, is its being the law of your nature. That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action, is itself alone an obligation. Conscience does not only offer itself to show us the way we should walk in, but it likewise carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide ; the guide assigned us by the Author of our nature : it therefore belongs to our condition of being, it is our duty to walk in that path, and follow this guide, without looking about to see whether we may not possibly forsake them with impunity.

(6) However, let us hear what is to be said against obeying this law of our nature. And the sum is no more than this : “ Why should we be concerned about anything out of and beyond ourselves ? If we do find within ourselves regards to others, and restraints of we know of Butler’s view between the *Sermons* and the *Analogy*, but he certainly never wavered in the conviction that, on the whole, the Conscience of the individual is a clear and reliable guide to conduct.]

not how many different kinds ; yet, these being embarrassments, and hindering us from going the nearest way to our own good, why should we not endeavour to suppress and get over them ? ”

(7) Thus people go on with words, which, when applied to human nature, and the condition in which it is placed in this world, have really no meaning. For does not all this kind of talk go upon supposition, that our happiness in this world consists in somewhat quite distinct from regards to others ; and that it is the privilege of vice to be without restraint or confinement ? Whereas on the contrary, the enjoyments, in a manner all the common enjoyments of life, even the pleasures of vice, depend upon these regards of one kind or another to our fellow-creatures. Throw off all regards to others, and we should be quite indifferent to infamy and to honour ; there could be no such thing at all as ambition ; and scarce any such thing as covetousness ; for we should likewise be equally indifferent to the disgrace of poverty, the several neglects and kinds of contempt which accompany this state ; and to the reputation of riches, the regard and respect they usually procure. Neither is restraint by any means peculiar to one course of life : but our very nature, exclusive of conscience and our condition, lays us under an absolute necessity of it. We cannot gain any end whatever without being confined to the proper means, which is often the most painful and uneasy confinement. And in numberless instances a present appetite cannot be gratified without such apparent and immediate ruin and misery, that the most dissolute man in the world chooses to forego the pleasure, rather than endure the pain.

(8) Is the meaning then, to indulge those regards to our fellow-creatures, and submit to those restraints, which upon the whole are attended with more satisfaction than uneasiness, and get over only those which bring

more uneasiness and inconvenience than satisfaction ? “ Doubtless this was our meaning.” You have changed sides then. Keep to this ; be consistent with yourselves ; and you and the men of virtue are *in general* perfectly agreed. But let us take care and avoid mistakes. Let it not be taken for granted that the temper of envy, rage, resentment, yields greater delight than meekness, forgiveness, compassion and good-will : especially when it is acknowledged that rage, envy, resentment, are in themselves mere misery ; and the satisfaction arising from the indulgence of them is little more than relief from that misery ; whereas the temper of compassion and benevolence is itself delightful ; and the indulgence of it, by doing good, affords new positive delight and enjoyment. Let it not be taken for granted, that the satisfaction arising from the reputation of riches and power however obtained, and from the respect paid to them, is greater than the satisfaction arising from the reputation of justice, honesty, charity, and the esteem which is universally acknowledged to be their due. And if it be doubtful which of these satisfactions is the greatest, as there are persons who think neither of them very considerable, yet there can be no doubt concerning ambition and covetousness, virtue and a good mind, considered in themselves, and as leading to different courses of life ; there can, I say, be no doubt, which temper and which course is attended with most peace and tranquillity of mind, which with most perplexity, vexation and inconvenience. And both the virtues and vices which have been now mentioned do, in a manner, equally imply in them regards of one kind or another to our fellow-creatures. And with respect to restraint and confinement : whoever will consider the restraints from fear and shame, the dissimulation, mean arts of concealment, servile compliances, one or other of which belong to

almost every course of vice, will soon be convinced that the man of virtue is by no means upon a disadvantage in this respect. How many instances are there in which men feel and own and cry aloud under the chains of vice with which they are enthralled, and which yet they will not shake off? How many instances, in which persons manifestly go through more pains and self-denial to gratify a vicious passion, than would have been necessary to the conquest of it? To this is to be added, that when virtue is become habitual, when the temper of it is acquired, what was before confinement ceases to be so, by becoming choice and delight.<sup>1</sup> Whatever restraint and guard upon ourselves may be needful to unlearn any unnatural distortion or odd gesture; yet, in all propriety of speech, natural behaviour must be the most easy and unrestrained. It is manifest that, in the common course of life, there is seldom any inconsistency between our duty and what is *called* interest: it is much seldomer that there is an inconsistency between duty and what is really our present interest; meaning by interest, happiness and satisfaction. Self-love, then, though confined to the interest of the present world, does in general perfectly coincide with virtue; and leads us to one and the same course of life. But, whatever exceptions there are to this, which are much fewer than they are commonly thought, all shall be set right at the final distribution of things. It is a manifest absurdity to suppose evil prevailing finally over good, under the conduct and administration of a perfect mind.

(9) The whole argument, which I have been now insisting upon, may be thus summed up and given you in one view. The nature of man is adapted to some course

<sup>1</sup> [Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* ii. 3: "The pleasure or pain that accompanies the acts must be taken as a test of the formed habit or character."]

of action or other. Upon comparing some actions with this nature, they appear suitable and correspondent to it : from comparison of other actions with the same nature, there arises to our view some unsuitableness or disproportion. The correspondence of actions to the nature of the agent renders them natural : their disproportion to it, unnatural. That an action is correspondent to the nature of the agent, does not arise from its being agreeable to the principle which happens to be the strongest : for it may be so, and yet be quite disproportionate to the nature of the agent. The correspondence therefore, or disproportion, arises from somewhat else. This can be nothing but a difference in nature and kind (altogether distinct from strength) between the inward principles. Some then are in nature and kind superior to others. And the correspondence arises from the action being conformable to the higher principle ; and the unsuitableness from its being contrary to it. Reasonable self-love and conscience are the chief or superior principles in the nature of man : because an action may be suitable to this nature, though all other principles be violated ; but becomes unsuitable, if either of those are. Conscience and self-love, if we understand our true happiness, always lead us the same way. Duty and interest are perfectly coincident : for the most part in this world, but entirely and in every instance if we take in the future, and the whole ; this being implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things. Thus they who have been so wise in their generation as to regard only their own supposed interest, at the expense and to the injury of others, shall at last find, that he who has given up all the advantages of the present world, rather than violate his conscience and the relations of life, has infinitely better provided for himself, and secured his own interest and happiness.

# DISSERTATION

## UPON THE NATURE OF VIRTUE <sup>1</sup>

### ANALYSIS

Men are capable of being under moral government because they have a faculty of moral approval and disapproval. Proofs of the existence of this faculty :—experience in ourselves : the existence of words conveying ideas of approval or disapproval : the existence of systems of morals : the sense of gratitude : the distinction between injury and mere harm : the distinction between injury and punishment.

Its dictates not in general doubtful. There is a universal standard of morality. § 1.

Observations on Conscience :—

(1) The object of moral judgment is primarily *actions*, but we include in the idea of action “ practical principles ” or motives, and hence *character*. Moral judgment is not of consequences but of intention : not of the power of the agent but of his character. § 2.

(2) Good and evil *desert* implied. Ill desert always supposes guilt. It arises from the natural association of the ideas of guilt and misery. § 3.

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<sup>1</sup> [This Dissertation belongs to the *Analogy*, where it forms an appendix to i. ch. 3, “ Of the Moral Government of God.” It is printed here because it is an indispensable document for the study of Butler’s ethical teaching.]

Doubtfulness of motives and strength of temptation affect our perception of desert. § 4.

- (3) The perception of ill desert arises from comparison between the actions and the nature and capacity of the agent. Hence vicious actions properly called "disproportionate" or "unfit." § 5.
- (4) Prudence or reasonable Self-love a virtue. The approbation of Prudence not the same as the desire for happiness. Whether called a virtue or not, Prudence is approved by Conscience, Prudence, as such, apart from its consequences. §§ 6, 7.
- (5) Benevolence not the whole of virtue. Conscience approves discrimination in objects of Benevolence; condemns falsehood, violence and injustice, as such, apart from their consequences. Even if Benevolence be the sum of goodness in God, it is not so in us. § 8.

Moral government consists in rendering men happy or unhappy according as they follow Conscience or not. § 9. The principle that Benevolence is the whole of virtue is dangerous. The happiness of the world the concern of its Governor. Our duty to promote it with due regard to Veracity and Justice. § 10.

Note, however, that falsehood exists only where there is intention to deceive. § 11.

(1) THAT which renders beings capable of moral government, is their having a moral nature, and moral faculties of perception and of action. Brute creatures are impressed and actuated by various instincts and propensions: so also are we. But additional to this, we have a capacity of reflecting upon actions and characters, and making them an object to our thought: and on doing this, we naturally and unavoidably approve some actions, under the peculiar view of their being virtuous and of good desert; and disapprove others, as vicious and of ill desert. That we have this moral approving and dis-

approving<sup>1</sup> faculty, is certain from our experiencing it in ourselves, and recognizing it in each other. It appears from our exercising it unavoidably, in the approbation and disapprobation even of feigned characters : from the words *right* and *wrong*, *odious* and *amiable*, *base* and *worthy*, with many others of like signification in all languages applied to actions and characters : from the many written systems of morals which suppose it ; since it cannot be imagined that all these authors, throughout all these treatises, had absolutely no meaning at all to their words, or a meaning merely chimerical : from our natural sense of gratitude, which implies a distinction between merely being the instrument of good, and intending it : from the like distinction every one makes between injury and mere harm, which, Hobbes says, is peculiar to mankind ; and between injury and just punishment, a distinction plainly natural, prior to the consideration of human laws. It is manifest great part of common language, and of common behaviour over the world, is formed upon supposition of such a moral faculty ; whether called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or divine reason ; whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart ; or, which seems the truth, as including both.

<sup>1</sup> This way of speaking is taken from Epictetus,<sup>2</sup> and is made use of as seeming the most full, and least liable to cavil. And the moral faculty may be understood to have these two epithets *δοκιμαστική* and *ἀποδοκιμαστική*, upon a double account ; because, upon a survey of actions, whether before or after they are done, it determines them to be good or evil ; and also because it determines itself to be the guide of action and of life, in contradistinction from all other faculties, or natural principles of action, in the very same manner as speculative reason *directly* and naturally judges of speculative truth and falsehood ; and at the same time is attended with a consciousness upon *reflection*, that the natural right to judge of them belongs to it.

<sup>2</sup> Arr. Epict. lib. i. cap. 1.

Nor is it at all doubtful in the general, what course of action this faculty, or practical discerning power within us, approves and what it disapproves. For, as much as it has been disputed wherein virtue consists, or whatever ground for doubt there may be about particulars; yet, in general, there is in reality an universally acknowledged standard of it. It is that, which all ages and all countries have made profession of in public: it is that, which every man you meet puts on the show of: it is that, which the primary and fundamental laws of all civil constitutions over the face of the earth make it their business and endeavour to enforce the practice of upon mankind: namely, justice, veracity and regard to common good. It being manifest then, in general, that we have such a faculty or discernment as this, it may be of use to remark some things more distinctly concerning it.

(2) *First*, It ought to be observed, that the object of this faculty is actions,<sup>1</sup> comprehending under that name active or practical principles: those principles from which men would act, if occasions and circumstances gave them power; and which, when fixed and habitual in any person, we call his character. It does not appear, that brutes have the least reflex sense of actions, as distinguished from events: or that will and design, which constitute the very nature of actions as such, are at all an object to their perception. But to ours they are: and they are the object, and the only one, of the approving and disapproving faculty. Acting, conduct, behaviour, abstracted from all regard to what is in fact and event the consequence of it, is itself the natural object of the moral discernment; as speculative truth and falsehood is of speculative reason. Intention of

<sup>1</sup> "Οὐδὲ ἡ ἀρετὴ καὶ κακία—ἐν πείσει, ἀλλὰ ἐν ἐργείᾳ," M. Anton, lib. ix. 16; "Virtutis laus omnis in actione consistit," Cic., *Off.* lib. i. cap. 6.

such and such consequences, indeed, is always included ; for it is part of the action itself : but though the intended good or bad consequences do not follow, we have exactly the same sense of the action as if they did. In like manner we think well or ill of characters, abstracted from all consideration of the good or the evil, which persons of such characters have it actually in their power to do. We never, in the moral way, applaud or blame either ourselves or others, for what we enjoy or what we suffer, or for having impressions made upon us which we consider as altogether out of our power : but only for what we do, or would have done, had it been in our power : or for what we leave undone, which we might have done, or would have left undone, though we could have done it.

(3) *Secondly*, Our sense or discernment of actions as morally good or evil, implies in it a sense or discernment of them as of good or ill desert. It may be difficult to explain this perception, so as to answer all the questions which may be asked concerning it : but every one speaks of such and such actions as deserving punishment ; and it is not, I suppose, pretended, that they have absolutely no meaning at all to the expression. Now the meaning plainly is not, that we conceive it for the good of society, that the doer of such actions should be made to suffer. For if, unhappily, it were resolved, that a man, who, by some innocent action, was infected with the plague, should be left to perish, lest, by other people's coming near him, the infection should spread ; no one would say he deserved this treatment. Innocence and ill desert are inconsistent ideas. Ill desert always supposes guilt : and if one be no part of the other, yet they are evidently and naturally connected in our mind. The sight of a man in misery raises our compassion towards him ; and, if this misery be inflicted on him by another, our indignation against the author of it. But when we are

informed, that the sufferer is a villain, and is punished only for his treachery or cruelty ; our compassion exceedingly lessens, and in many instances our indignation wholly subsides. Now what produces this effect is the conception of that in the sufferer, which we call ill desert. Upon considering then, or viewing together, our notion of vice and that of misery, there results a third, that of ill desert. And thus there is in human creatures an association of the two ideas, natural and moral evil, wickedness and punishment. If this association were merely artificial or accidental, it were nothing : but being most unquestionably natural, it greatly concerns us to attend to it, instead of endeavouring to explain it away.

(4) It may be observed further, concerning our perception of good and of ill desert, that the former is very weak with respect to common instances of virtue. One reason of which may be, that it does not appear to a spectator, how far such instances of virtue proceed from a virtuous principle, or in what degree this principle is prevalent : since a very weak regard to virtue may be sufficient to make men act well in many common instances. And on the other hand, our perception of ill desert in vicious actions lessens, in proportion to the temptations men are thought to have had to such vices. For, vice in human creatures consisting chiefly in the absence or want of the virtuous principle ; though a man be overcome, suppose, by tortures, it does not from thence appear to what degree the virtuous principle was wanting. All that appears is, that he had it not in such a degree as to prevail over the temptation ; but possibly he had it in a degree, which would have rendered him proof against common temptations.

(5) *Thirdly*, Our perception of vice and ill desert arises from, and is the result of, a comparison of actions with the nature and capacities of the agent. For the mere

neglect of doing what we ought to do would, in many cases, be determined by all men to be in the highest degree vicious. And this determination must arise from such comparison, and be the result of it ; because such neglect would not be vicious in creatures of other natures and capacities, as brutes. And it is the same also with respect to positive vices, or such as consist in doing what we ought not. For, every one has a different sense of harm done by an idiot, madman or child, and by one of mature and common understanding ; though the action of both, including the intention, which is part of the action, be the same : as it may be, since idiots and madmen, as well as children, are capable not only of doing mischief, but also of intending it. Now this difference must arise from somewhat discerned in the nature or capacities of one, which renders the action vicious ; and the want of which, in the other, renders the same action innocent or less vicious : and this plainly supposes a comparison, whether reflected upon or not, between the action and capacities of the agent, previous to our determining an action to be vicious. And hence arises a proper application of the epithets, *incongruous*, *unsuitable*, *disproportionate*, *unfit*, to actions which our moral faculty determines to be vicious.

(6) *Fourthly*, It deserves to be considered, whether men are more at liberty, in point of morals, to make themselves miserable without reason, than to make other people so : or dissolutely to neglect their own greater good, for the sake of a present lesser gratification, than they are to neglect the good of others, whom nature has committed to their care. It should seem, that a due concern about our own interest or happiness, and a reasonable endeavour to secure and promote it, which is, I think, very much the meaning of the word *prudence*, in our language ; it should seem, that this is virtue, and

the contrary behaviour faulty and blameable ; since, in the calmest way of reflection, we approve of the first, and condemn the other conduct, both in ourselves and others. This approbation and disapprobation are altogether different from mere desire of our own, or of their happiness, and from sorrow upon missing it. For the object or occasion of this last kind of perception is satisfaction or uneasiness : whereas the object of the first is active behaviour. In one case, what our thoughts fix upon is our condition : in the other, our conduct. It is true indeed, that nature has not given us so sensible a disapprobation of imprudence and folly, either in *ourselves* or *others*, as of falsehood, injustice and cruelty : I suppose, because that constant habitual sense of private interest and good, which we always carry about with us, renders such sensible disapprobation less necessary, less wanting, to keep us from imprudently neglecting our own happiness, and foolishly injuring ourselves, than it is necessary and wanting to keep us from injuring others, to whose good we cannot have so strong and constant a regard : and also because imprudence and folly, appearing to bring its own punishment more immediately and constantly than injurious behaviour, it less needs the additional punishment, which would be inflicted upon it by others, had they the same sensible indignation against it, as against injustice, and fraud, and cruelty. Besides, unhappiness being in itself the natural object of compassion ; the unhappiness which people bring upon themselves, though it be wilfully, excites in us some pity for them : and this of course lessens our displeasure against them. But still it is matter of experience, that we are formed so as to reflect very severely upon the greater instances of imprudent neglect and foolish rashness, both in ourselves and others. In instances of this kind, men often say of themselves with remorse, and of

others with some indignation, that they deserved to suffer such calamities, because they brought them upon themselves, and would not take warning. Particularly when persons come to poverty and distress by a long course of extravagance, and after frequent admonitions, though without falsehood or injustice ; we plainly do not regard such people as alike objects of compassion with those, who are brought into the same condition by unavoidable accidents. From these things it appears, that prudence is a species of virtue, and folly of vice : meaning by *folly*, somewhat quite different from mere incapacity ; a thoughtless want of that regard and attention to our own happiness, which we had capacity for. And this the word properly includes ; and, as it seems, in its usual acceptation : for we scarcely apply it to brute creatures.

(7) However, if any person be disposed to dispute the matter, I shall very willingly give him up the words virtue and vice, as not applicable to prudence and folly : but must beg leave to insist, that the faculty within us, which is the judge of actions, approves of prudent actions, and disapproves imprudent ones ; I say prudent and imprudent *actions* as such, and considered distinctly from the happiness or misery which they occasion. And, by the way, this observation may help to determine what justness there is in that objection against religion, that it teaches us to be interested and selfish.

(8) *Fifthly*, Without inquiring how far, and in what sense, virtue is resolvable into benevolence, and vice into the want of it ; it may be proper to observe, that benevolence, and the want of it, singly considered, are in no sort the whole of virtue and vice. For if this were the case, in the review of one's own character, or that of others, our moral understanding and moral sense would be indifferent to everything, but the degrees in which

benevolence prevailed, and the degrees in which it was wanting. That is, we should neither approve of benevolence to some persons rather than to others, nor disapprove injustice and falsehood upon any other account, than merely as an overbalance of happiness was foreseen likely to be produced by the first, and of misery by the second. But now, on the contrary, suppose two men competitors for anything whatever, which would be of equal advantage to each of them; though nothing indeed would be more impertinent, than for a stranger to busy himself to get one of them preferred to the other; yet such endeavour would be virtue, in behalf of a friend or benefactor, abstracted from all consideration of distant consequences: as that examples of gratitude, and the cultivation of friendship, would be of general good to the world. Again, suppose one man should, by fraud or violence, take from another the fruit of his labour, with intent to give it to a third, who he thought would have as much pleasure from it as would balance the pleasure which the first possessor would have had in the enjoyment, and his vexation in the loss of it; suppose also that no bad consequences would follow: yet such an action would surely be vicious. Nay further, were treachery, violence and injustice not otherwise vicious, than as foreseen likely to produce an overbalance of misery to society; then, if in any case a man could procure to himself as great advantage by an act of injustice, as the whole foreseen inconvenience, likely to be brought upon others by it, would amount to; such a piece of injustice would not be faulty or vicious at all: because it would be no more than, in any other case, for a man to prefer his own satisfaction to another's in equal degrees. The fact then appears to be, that we are constituted so as to condemn falsehood, unprovoked violence, injustice, and to approve of benevolence to

some preferably to others, abstracted from all consideration, which conduct is likeliest to produce an over-balance of happiness or misery. And therefore, were the Author of Nature to propose nothing to himself as an end but the production of happiness, were his moral character merely that of benevolence ; yet ours is not so. Upon that supposition indeed the only reason of his giving us the above-mentioned approbation of benevolence to some persons rather than others, and disapprobation of falsehood, unprovoked violence and injustice, must be, that he foresaw this constitution of our nature would produce more happiness, than forming us with a temper of mere general benevolence. But still, since this is our constitution ; falsehood, violence, injustice, must be vice in us, and benevolence to some, preferably to others, virtue ; abstracted from all consideration of the over-balance of evil or good, which they may appear likely to produce.

(9) Now if human creatures are endued with such a moral nature as we have been explaining, or with a moral faculty, the natural object of which is actions ; moral government must consist in rendering them happy and unhappy, in rewarding and punishing them as they follow, neglect or depart from the moral rule of action interwoven in their nature, or suggested and enforced by this moral faculty : <sup>1</sup> in rewarding and punishing them upon account of their so doing.

(10) I am not sensible that I have, in this fifth observation, contradicted what any author designed to assert. But some of great and distinguished merit have, I think, expressed themselves in a manner which may occasion some danger to careless readers, of imagining the whole of virtue to consist in singly aiming, according to the best of their judgment, at promoting the happiness

<sup>1</sup> *Analogy*, pt. i. ch. vi.

of mankind in the present state ; and the whole of vice in doing what they foresee, or might foresee, is likely to produce an overbalance of unhappiness in it ; than which mistakes, none can be conceived more terrible.<sup>1</sup> For it is certain, that some of the most shocking instances of injustice, adultery, murder, perjury, and even of persecution, may, in many supposable cases, not have the appearance of being likely to produce an overbalance of misery in the present state ; perhaps sometimes may have the contrary appearance. For this reflection might easily be carried on, but I forbear.—The happiness of the world is the concern of him who is the Lord and the Proprietor of it : nor do we know what we are about, when we endeavour to promote the good of mankind in any ways, but those which he has directed ; that is indeed in all ways not contrary to veracity and justice. I speak thus upon supposition of persons really endeavouring, in some sort, to do good without regard to these. But the truth seems to be, that such supposed endeavours proceed, almost always, from ambition, the spirit of party, or some indirect principle, concealed perhaps in great measure from persons themselves. And though it is our business and our duty to endeavour, within the bounds of veracity and justice, to contribute to the ease, convenience and even cheerfulness and diversion of our fellow-creatures : yet, from our short views, it is greatly uncertain, whether this endeavour will in particular instances produce an overbalance of happiness upon the whole ; since so many and distant things must come into the account. And that which makes it our duty is, that there is some appearance that it will, and no positive appearance sufficient to balance this, on the contrary side ; and also, that such benevolent

<sup>1</sup> [The writers referred to are probably Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.]

endeavour is a cultivation of that most excellent of all virtuous principles, the active principle of benevolence.

(11) However, though veracity, as well as justice, is to be our rule of life ; it must be added, otherwise a snare will be laid in the way of some plain men, that the use of common forms of speech, generally understood, cannot be falsehood; and in general, that there can be no designed falsehood without designing to deceive. It must likewise be observed, that in numberless cases, a man may be under the strictest obligations to what he foresees will deceive, without his intending it. For it is impossible not to foresee, that the words and actions of men, in different ranks and employments, and of different educations, will perpetually be mistaken by each other ; and it cannot but be so, whilst they will judge with the utmost carelessness, as they daily do, of what they are not, perhaps, enough informed to be competent judges of, even though they considered it with great attention.

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